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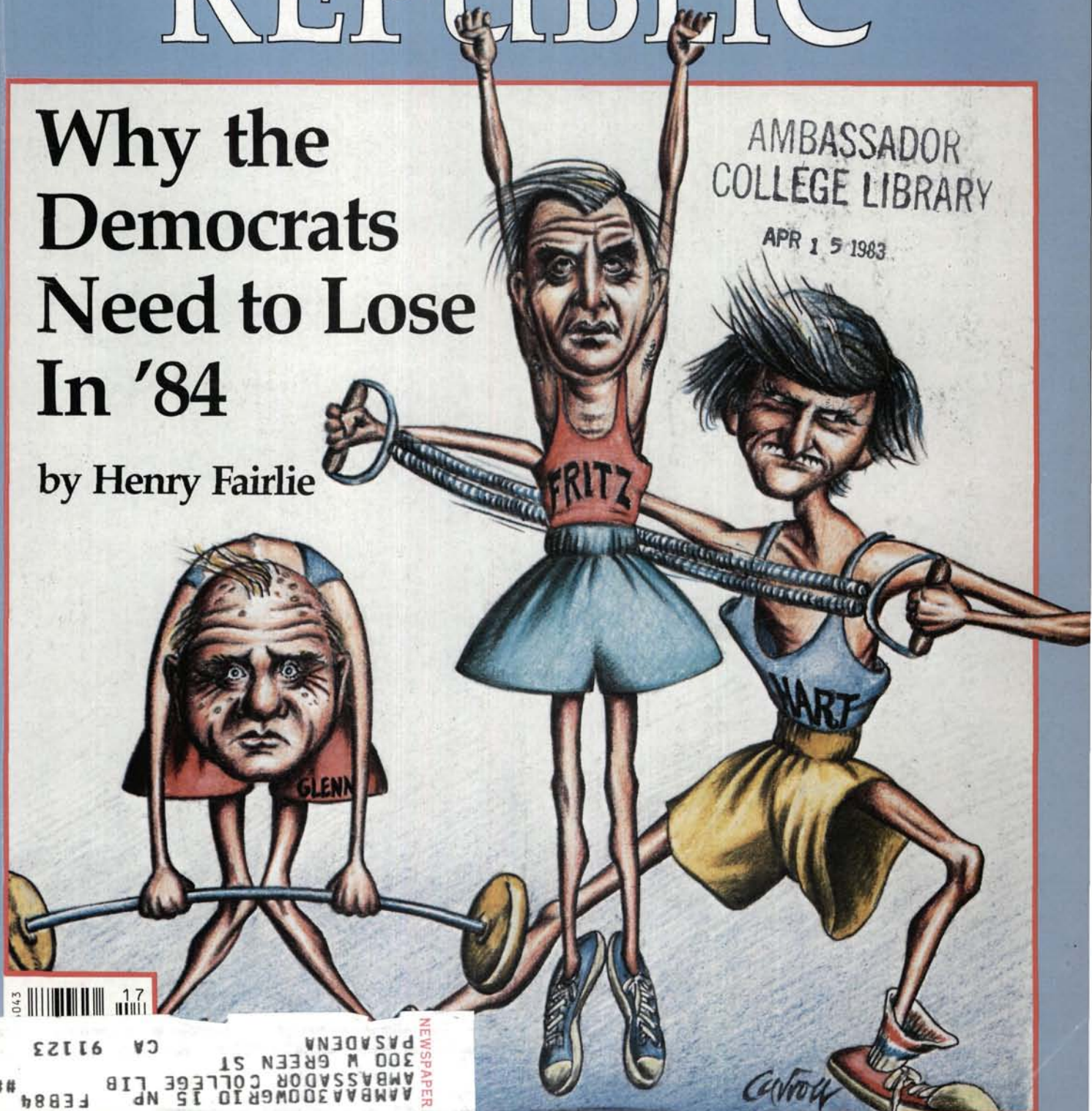
## Risking Disaster in Nicaragua

*Robert Alter on the Yale Critics • Reagan's Gag Rule*

# THE NEW REPUBLIC

## Why the Democrats Need to Lose In '84

by Henry Fairlie

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## REAGAN AND RELIGION

*To the editors:*

Your editorial, "Reverend Reagan" (TNR, April 11), attempts to define the nature of America's founding, including the role of the opponents of the proposed Constitution: the Antifederalists. Unfortunately, the editorial fails to understand these often forgotten foes of the Constitution and also fails to present a fair picture of this nation's origins when it states that the Antifederalists opposed the "remorseless rationalism" of the Constitution and cites the example of the argument that the Constitution lacked a sense of religion.

The Antifederalists, far from being distrusting of a rational political model, offered their own set of positive political principles as a valid and rational alternative structure to the proposed Constitution. Their political model called for defined and limited national powers to govern specific national objects, while the states retained sovereignty over all other objects. Only such a confederated Republic would allow representation to reflect both the nature of the American people and ensure that political power responsibly governed the proper portions of their lives.

This alternative is also reflected in the real legacy of the Antifederalists: the Bill of Rights. These rights included the provisions that guaranteed free exercise of religion and preserved the separation of church and state.

The "Reagan Revolution" had its beginnings not in a rejection of remorseless rationalism but in an altogether different and incorrect interpretation of the American founding. The conservative right is unknowingly declaring the Antifederalists' arguments against the Constitution to be the true thoughts of the founding fathers. The President's preferred political structure is that model originally offered by the Antifederalists. This new conservative tide needs to be contested not for having a simple and homey view of American society, but for being based on a thoroughly conceived political model founded on concrete principles that were rejected two hundred years ago.

It is only by having a complete understanding of the debate over the Constitution that we can grasp the full importance of the American founding. It is only by a full understanding of the American founding that we can once again reject the political model offered by the prominent conservative members of our national government.

WILLIAM ISAACSON
*Washington, D.C.*

*To the editors:*

"Reverend Reagan" was right on target. The President can't seem to get it through his head that the First Amendment principle of separation of church and state is the any effective guarantee of religious liberty, and that, as Franklin put it, if a religion cannot stand without the help of government, there is something wrong with it.

Here we have the spectacle of a President who says he wants to shrink government and get it off the people's backs, but who wants government to mandate, regulate, homogenize, and trivialize prayer in public schools; who wants government to impose a theology of fetal personhood on all women; who wants to force all citizens through his tuition tax credit and voucher plans to contribute involuntarily to the support of religious institutions; and who would, if he could, sabotage public school science teaching by intruding the of creationism. As a losing plaintiff in a recent Supreme Court test of the donation of "surplus" public property to a seminary, I can attest that Mr. Reagan also wants to deny citizens the right to challenge government actions that violate the First Amendment.

No President has ever tried so hard to undermine the First Amendment. With Madison, we should take alarm at these experiments on our liberties.

EDD DOERR
*Silver Spring, Maryland*

## GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

*To the editors:*

The most disturbing aspect of Thomas Nagel's deeply moving essay ("A Month in the Country," TNR, March 14) is his expectation that black freedom will be achieved only through violence. Surely he cannot mean that black South Africans can win recognition of their

*continued on page 38*

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# THE NEW REPUBLIC

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FROM WASHINGTON

## WHITE CHICAGO

Ask yourself what you'd do in my position. I run a ward for the Cook County Democratic organization. I like the job, and I'm not likely to keep it if I try to lead my people in a direction they don't want to go, and that means Harold Washington.

Of course race is a factor; it's the major factor. Some of the people in my ward have already moved twice to get to these neighborhoods; some have lived here for three generations. They don't want to move again. They don't know what difference Washington would make to their schools and their neighborhoods, but they're scared.

I've delivered votes to other black candidates—Roland Burris and Cecil Partee, to name two. I might be able to deliver some to Harold Washington if he were a different sort of man. But this guy is a mess. He didn't file his taxes for four years—he says he forgot. You know what's going on all over my ward right now? People are hunched over kitchen tables figuring their taxes. This time of year, they get nervous about being late. I don't have to tell you what they think about Harold Washington not paying taxes.

A lot of people say the tax issue is a proxy for the race issue. What my people say is that if Harold Washington were white, they wouldn't vote for him. Now they're supposed to vote for him *because he's black*? To prove they're not bigots? I know a few bars in my ward where you might try out that logic.

Look, the truth is that Washington could have had this election in the satchel right now if he'd behaved differently after the primary. There are stories all over this town about how Washington wouldn't return Mondale's calls, about how long Rostenkowski had to wait. This guy says he intends to dismantle the machine, he won't give us the time of day, and we're supposed to deliver votes to him?

Blacks have not gotten a great deal from the Chicago machine, I admit that. We've dragged our feet on schools, on neighborhoods, on city jobs. Jesse Jackson says Chicago is the most segregated city in the country. Well, he didn't make that up. The U.S. Civil Rights Commission tagged us with that.

You know, Bernie Epton is using the slogan, "Before It's Too Late." What does that mean? It means before the blacks take over the city. Let me give you a for instance. Our police department is about a quarter black. For nearly ten years Chicago has been under a federal court order to hire more minorities. That lawsuit was brought by a black cop named Renault Robinson, who's hated by white cops, and who's a top aide to Harold Washington. Washington has said that he would make the force 40 percent black, that he'd have fired Commissioner Richard Brzeczek—the top-ranking Polish city official who just quit. There are over a hundred top jobs in the police department—all appointive. Do you know who'd get those jobs under Mayor Washington? The guys on the force think they know. Right now, the police department is completely polarized. White cops are for Epton, black cops are for Washington. About half the "Democrats for Epton" offices in town are being run and paid for by off-duty cops. Democratic cops organizing precincts for a Republican. I never thought I'd see it in my life.

And this guy Epton is no bargain either. He's a liberal, rich, Hyde Park, John Anderson Republican. Not only is he for abortion, he's for the state footing the bills for abortion. He's for open housing, which to my people means a low-income housing project in their neighborhood, and legalizing marijuana. If he were running for state legislature in my ward, I couldn't get him elected with that record. But if Bernie Epton were Irish, not Jewish, and against abortion, I guarantee he'd win this election in a landslide.

Epton has to make a deal with us ward leaders, and he knows it. If he wins, he will walk into the City Council and find no Republicans. Sure, I made a deal with Epton before I endorsed him—not with Epton personally, but I have an understanding with his people. My patronage jobs will be protected, and no new public housing projects in this ward. With that I can deliver a lot of votes to Epton—votes that were probably going to him anyway.

I don't blame Harold Washington for refusing to deal with us. This ward cast 30,000 votes in the primary; fewer than 200 of those were for Washington. My people are afraid Jesse Jackson is going to be the deputy mayor, and Washington will have to spend every Saturday morning down at Operation PUSH. So, what am I going to tell them? That I made a deal with Harold to protect our jobs? The best I could do for Washington is to go to my people and say, "Look, your job will be O.K., but we've got to have some votes for the guy, so tell your families." I could maybe get 1,000 votes with that argument. Then I could drive up election money and rides, leave the old folks in the nursing homes on April 12, and pick up a couple thousand more votes. Harold Washington might not think 3,000 votes is worth dealing for, but multiply it by 15 or so white wards, and it could be the difference between winning and losing.

Now the Democratic National Committee is sending a bunch of big names in here—Mondale, Cranston, Glenn, Claude Pepper, even Bert Lance—who tell us to vote for Harold Washington because he won the primary. That's not the issue. If Washington loses in Chicago, they think Jesse Jackson will go out and organize a black candidacy in the Presidential primaries. He'll use Chicago as an excuse to renegotiate a contract between blacks and the Democratic Party. That could screw up the chances for a Democrat to win in November. Jesse scares the hell out of the national Democrats. Well, he scares the hell out of voters in this ward, too.

You remember when Mondale and Washington were heckled at the church? That was a set-up job. The Washington people want things to get so nasty in the neighborhoods that the white Lake Shore liberals say, "The guy may not pay his taxes, but if I vote for Epton, people will think I am a racist like those yahoos on the local news." It may work. But actually it doesn't matter who wins this election, Bernie Epton or Harold Washington. Four years from now Richie Daley will be running again, and he'll get things back to normal.



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THE NEW REPUBLIC
APRIL 25, 1983

# LEAKY LIBERTIES

Having left public office, Jody Powell plans to write a newspaper column, and he would like to lecture in a political science class at his alma mater. But before he writes and before he lectures, he must gain the approval of government censors. Mr. Powell wants to publish his memoirs, but this too requires official clearance. It hasn't happened yet, but a recent Presidential directive has suddenly made this kind of government interference a real prospect. The edict is designed to prevent leaks of classified information that may threaten national security. We have no quarrel with this goal; the government should protect legitimate secrets. Prudence requires that some information—the identities of intelligence agents, certain negotiation strategies, some military technology, covert operations within the framework of the law—remain secret. But in his attempt to prevent damaging disclosures, the President has gone beyond prudence. He has infringed upon the civil liberties of thousands of people by restricting their right to free speech.

The directive requires present and former government officials with access to the highly classified material known as "Sensitive Compartmented Information" (S.C.I.) to seek official clearance for all public statements about their experiences—for the rest of their lives. This may mean federal censorship of future newspaper articles, campaign speeches, memoirs, lectures, broadcasts, and even fiction. The rule applies to thousands of senior officials in the military, the White House, the National Security Agency, the State Department, the Pentagon, and other executive agencies. Previously such restrictions were enforced only by the C.I.A. (and then with unfair selectivity). Although the new law appears to apply specifically to those with S.C.I. clearance, civil liberties experts say that its ambiguous language may lay the groundwork for a much wider application.

The President's order restrains one of our best ways of learning how the federal government actually works—the willingness of participants to tell their stories. It means that before Alexander Haig gives a public lecture, or Leslie Gelb writes an article, or Bill Moyers makes a broadcast, or Henry Kissinger completes a volume of memoirs, he will have to gain the Administration's approval. Furthermore, the order promises to be a bureaucratic nightmare. It fails, for example, to specify what materials must be submitted for review, leaving each agency to establish its own criteria. The C.I.A. requires the review of anything written about the general topic of intelligence-gathering activities. Will the State Department now examine everything written by former diplomats about "foreign policy"? Will the Defense Department convene its censorship panel every time one of its many officials speaks out on "national defense"? And what about those officials, such as, say, George Bush, who have worked for more than one agency? To ensure the protection of sensitive information, the directive seems to require that Mr. Bush's public statements be subject to the review of censors not only in the White House, but in the Army and State Department as well. Requiring that former officials negotiate the labyrinths of review procedures every time they want to speak—even if these procedures are conducted in

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good faith—promises delays that will make timely comment impossible and choke off informed public debate.

And there can be no assurances that good faith will prevail. Prepublication review places in the hands of incumbent officials the power to silence criticism from their predecessors and political opponents. History shows that censors spend much of their time suppressing information which poses no threat to national security, but which is embarrassing to certain officials. In the past five years, the C.I.A. has reviewed more than 800 manuscripts by former agents. Among the "secrets" C.I.A. censors have sought to protect have been stories about funds wasted on office redecoration and former Director Richard Helms's mispronunciation of the Malagasy Republic. It took former agent Ralph W. McGehee two years to get his book approved, even though it contained no "sensitive" disclosures. And these examples come from an agency whose former agents are likely to be sympathetic to stringent security measures. It is true that those censored have the recourse of judicial review, but courts involve time and money, and judges tend to be reluctant to second-guess government testimony about sensitive matters. Freedom of speech means more than the freedom to seek permission to speak.

THE EDICT also specifies that in the event of a leak, any of the hundreds of thousands of government employees with access to classified material (not just S.C.I.) may be forced to take lie detector tests. A Justice Department fact sheet accompanying the directive explained that "the use of the polygraph in any particular case will be subject to the discretion of an employee's agency head," and that those who refuse "will be subject to mandatory administrative sanctions, to include as a minimum, denial of further access to classified information." Polygraph tests are unreliable and inadmissible as evidence in court. In the event of a leak—or a supposed leak—the leaders of administrative witch hunts will not be held to the same procedural constraints as are practiced elsewhere in society. Nor will the hunted be protected by the same procedural safeguards. And what's to guard against the abuse of polygraphs by agency heads engaged in bureaucratic infighting with their subordinates? Moreover, the order is mistaken in presuming that leaks come most often from the belly of the bureaucracy, rather than from the head. The views of White House National Security Adviser William Clark, a secrecy zealot rivaling only President Reagan himself, are appearing with surprising regularity in that catch-basin of Washington leakery, the Evans and Novak column, raising questions about who should lie-detect the detector. The directive may stem the flow of legitimate free speech, but it is unlikely to stem the flow of leaks.

In fact, we suspect that's not what the President is really after. When Mr. Reagan says he's had it up to his "keister" with leaks, what he means is political embarrassments. Justice Department officials have repeatedly declined to provide an example of a recent breach in security that could have been prevented by the provisions of the new directive. They argue, with some justification, that to point to a security leak would only compound the damage. But a democratic society cannot be expected to accept on faith drastic curtailments of basic freedoms. Although we don't know what security leaks the government may have spouted, we do know that political leaks are coming in torrents. Administration officials were furious, for example, when *The Washington Post* reported in January 1982 that at a "secret" meeting of the Defense Resources Board, officials estimated that the President's military buildup might cost as much as 50 percent more than the $1.5 trillion announced. The Defense Department plugged in its polygraph and went looking for the source. It was never found. Political leaks are a standard form of Washington communication, and one that has traditionally raised the President's dander. Mr. Nixon's plumbers couldn't plug them; neither will Mr. Reagan's censors.

Two conditions encourage leaks, and the Reagan Administration has supplied both. One is a sense among political players that ordinary channels of communication have been blocked. Memos get screened, but newspapers do not, and a frustrated official may turn to a reporter to get his message across. One White House staffer, for example, went so far as to tell a *New York Times* reporter in January that the budget process was an "unmitigated disaster." And two weeks ago the Defense Department leaked a letter of complaint by the American Marine Commandant in Beirut in order to publicize tensions in the field.

A SECOND FACTOR that encourages disclosures is the sense that not everything that is classified deserves to be. Some insiders estimate that as much as 95 percent of classified material would be harmless to national security if it were revealed. Here too the Reagan Administration has invited unauthorized disclosures by classifying material that previous Administrations would have made public. For thirty years, from Presidents Truman through Carter, the government made an effort to declassify information, not classify it. "Top secret is meaningless," said Richard Nixon in 1971, noting that state secrets included the White House menu. In 1978 President Carter signed an executive order requiring government officials to consider the public's right to know before classifying a document. In 1980 Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti issued an order requiring government lawyers to consider whether information had been properly classified before seeking punitive action against those who may have disclosed it. The Reagan Administration has reversed these rulings and promoted a number of excessive secrecy measures, including major modifications of the Freedom of Information Act (See "Secrecy Mania," TNR, April 28, 1982). Officials are now required to classify materials at their highest, not lowest, secrecy levels, and the judiciary's authority to comment on the process has been stripped. Restriction of public access to information



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does not stop leaks, it encourages them.

President Reagan's latest directive needs no Congressional ratification; it has already taken effect. Congress could, however, pass its own law significantly reducing the scope of the directive. The President's initiative is the latest manifestation of an attitude that views information as a dangerous thing that the American people are better off without. Both the directive and the attitude are profoundly wrong. The country can afford a leaky government: it's part of the price (or, looked at another way, one of the benefits) of an open society. What the country can't afford is a leaky Bill of Rights.

## TWIST AND SHOUT

Pity the First Amendment. How many of its beneficiaries bludgeon it! The President, too. He twists it in a sermon about sin and social policy, and in a national security directive about the official clearance of information. But the Jeffersonians in the land cannot complain that violence to this primary American value comes only from above. Unfortunately, it comes also from below. A new method for the prevention of free discussion has been introduced into American political culture. It is the heckler's veto; or, as *The Nation* philosophically put it, "the right to heckle." It was tested with great success upon U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was driven from a platform at Berkeley on February 15 by supporters of democracy in Central America, and was disinvited to speak at commencement at Smith College because the campus administration callowly refused to protect her against demonstrators. There have been other victims of the heckler's veto as well. When Sheik Yamani came to Kansas City to give his excuses for his audience's heating bills, he was shouted down, and continued his lecture after the police removed the shouters. (They were Iranians, who did not inherit a First Amendment.) And, at Stanford Law School, Jack Greenberg of the N.A.A.C.P., who has won more civil rights cases than any other man, did not even make it to the lectern; black student protesters saw to it that his course was closed down.

The issue is not merely civility, though we will be forgiven for the bourgeois belief that it matters, too. The issue is the theory of an open society. The heckler's veto is a challenge to the proudly procedural character of democracy. A democracy is premised not upon the content of your belief, but upon your right to it. Indeed, it is the indifference of our system of public discussion to the content of what is discussed that makes the system free. Anything goes, says our sublime amendment. Not the heckler. Anything correct goes, says he, and he will be happy to tell you what correctness is. With the introduction of a criterion of correctness, of philosophical and political preconditions for participation in the public discussion, the theory of an open society is tampered with.

Heckling may not look like a moral or political offense, but it is. It is an expression of a desire to silence the other. It is, in short, a petty form of repression; and it is one of the many luxuries of American public life that we may cry havoc even about repression's petty forms. A large number of organizations representing college administrators, teachers, and students have done just that. They came together to issue a statement that declares: "The 'hiss and boo,' when they go beyond brief expressions of opposition and become instruments to silence those with whom one disagrees, are inappropriate at any public gathering, but especially in places of higher learning."

Meanwhile at Berkeley it feels like old times. *The Nation*'s correspondent (Mario Savio, phone home) discusses "the competing claims of hecklers and lecturers"—no doubt another of the many contradictions of monopoly capitalism. "The First Amendment," he writes, "was designed to empower ordinary citizens against officialdom." This man should go back and hit the books. The First Amendment proscribes "abridging the freedom of speech," and abridged is exactly what Mrs. Kirkpatrick's freedom was. It goes on to speak of "the right of the people . . . to petition the government for a redress of grievances," but it is not clear what the hecklers' grievances are, except that there exist views different from their own. Mrs. Kirkpatrick's views on El Salvador, however, are irrelevant to her right to make them known.

No. Do not pity the First Amendment. Pity those who do not understand it.

## NOTEBOOK

□ TWENTY YEARS AGO IN THE NEW REPUBLIC: "This numbers game, though not meaningless, may, however, distract attention from a fact that is more fundamental than any minor points on the Geneva agenda. The whole background of this discussion has been altered because the military odds have shifted so overwhelmingly in America's favor. Secretary McNamara is the expert witness: 'Our number of nuclear weapons in any category I am familiar with exceeds the number of weapons in a similar category in the hands of the Soviet Union.' This does not mean that the U.S. would not suffer intolerable damage in a nuclear war, for Mr. McNamara has said that no matter how many missiles the U.S. has, it cannot hope, in a war, to eliminate all of the enemy's military power, including its hardened and its submarine-launched missiles. What the U.S. is aiming at is a capability of striking back, after receiving a first blow, with enough force to destroy completely the Soviet Union." ("What Is Enough?" The Editors, April 27, 1963.)



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Guerrilla diplomacy in Nicaragua.

# PATH TO DISASTER?

THE UNITED STATES is risking disaster—another Bay of Pigs and possibly worse—by giving aid to rightist guerrillas bent on overthrowing the government of Nicaragua. There is a small chance that the Reagan Administration's policy will succeed in pressuring the Nicaraguans to stop conducting their "revolution without frontiers" in the rest of Central America, but it is much more likely that it will fail. The Administration is backing a guerrilla force comprised mainly of former members of dictator Anastasio Somoza's detested National Guard, rather than of proved democrats. The guerrilla operation may be too small to topple the Sandinista regime or to force it to change policies, but large enough to give it an excuse for snuffing out what little is left of liberty in Nicaragua, and perhaps launching "retaliatory" raids into Honduras and Costa Rica.

Meanwhile, the Administration has failed miserably to persuade the American people and Congress that its policy is sound and its cause just. Congress, for its part, does not want very much to be persuaded. Many younger members, especially, seem reflexively opposed to the use of American power anywhere, and there is a good chance they will succeed in denying the Administration funds to continue what it has started with Nicaragua. That will demoralize America's allies in the region, including both democrats and rightists, and will embolden Nicaragua and Cuba. The disaster would be of Bay of Pigs proportions if the American-backed guerrilla operations end in bloody defeat. There will be a much bigger disaster if revolutionary war engulfs the region and our friends lose. If there is an alternative to disaster and the blame-casting that surely would follow a Communist victory in Central America, it would seem to lie in a redesign of Administration policy and an urgent effort to win a national consensus for it.

To start with, the Administration does nothing at all for American credibility by refusing public confirmation of what the whole world knows: that the Central Intelligence Agency is providing arms, training, and intelligence support to the Honduran-based Nicaraguan Democratic Force (F.D.N.), which has between 2,000 and 5,000 fighters operating inside Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan government has accused the United States of waging war against it, and F.D.N. rebels are taking American reporters on raids with them. Yet Administration officials are barred from talking about what this country is doing. As a result, whatever charges are made by the Sandinistas and whatever claims are made by the rebels dominate public and world opinion.

The F.D.N. is far too small to overthrow the Nicaraguan regime, which has an army of 24,000 men equipped with Soviet tanks plus a civilian militia twice that large, but the rebels naturally see the Sandinistas' ouster as their goal. The Sandinistas are only too happy to have it thought that they are being threatened, the better to justify their arms build-up and domestic repression. However, since passage of the so-called Boland Amendment last December 21, it is against U.S. law to give aid to Nicaraguan rebels for the purpose of overthrowing the Sandinista regime.

Administration officials stoutly deny they are breaking that law, but their defense sounds as though it depends upon a shyster lawyer's technicality—the absence of intent to overthrow Nicaragua—and this further undermines U.S. credibility. The Boland Amendment originally was passed as a substitute for legislation drafted by Representative Thomas Harkin of Iowa forbidding U.S. assistance to Nicaraguan rebels for any purpose. Now Representative Michael Barnes of Maryland and other House doves are seizing upon the Administration's self-imposed inability fully to explain its activities to force through another fund cut-off resolution. Administration policy also is under attack from moderates such as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who feels that the C.I.A. has let the Nicaragua operation grow without adequate consultation with Congress's intelligence oversight committees.

IT'S A TRICKY BUSINESS, but since it seems impossible to keep covert operations of such magnitude secret, the Administration may as well acknowledge what it is doing and defend it publicly. It would help, too, if Administration policy were fully defensible—if the groups the United States is aiding were true democratic freedom fighters rather than ex-Somocistas. In fact, the C.I.A. reportedly has tried to weed out close and corrupt associates of Somoza, and it has been hampered by the fact that former National Guardsmen tend to be the only sizable group of anti-Sandinistas who know how to use guns. The Administration has tried to recruit members of the anti-Somoza Conservative Party into leadership positions of the rebel group, but so far it has failed to draw in the most credible of the anti-Sandinistas, including the legendary revolutionary Eden Pastora ("Commander Zero") and Alfonso Robelo, a businessman who was a member of the first post-Somoza revolutionary junta. The C.I.A. is helping one faction of Miskito Indian rebels, but another remains outside the F.D.N.

There are those in Congress and outside who genuinely believe that helping rebels and fomenting insurrection is a doomed policy. Among these is the Carter Administration's former Ambassador to Nicaragua, Lawrence Pezzullo, a tough ex-career diplomat who thinks the Reagan Administration should have kept negotiating lines and a flow of aid open to the Nicaraguans in hopes of maintaining influence and encouraging moderate elements to stay in the country. He thinks that the moderates might have forced the government to hold elections as promised in 1985, leading to an ouster of the Sandinistas. "We should've been patient," he told me, "and let the situation devolve."

The current policy, Pezzullo said, "is bush league, pen-



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ny ante. There aren't enough resources to actually eliminate the regime, and Congress won't vote them. If Congress cuts off aid, the guerrillas will say the U.S. sold them out. If Congress lets the Administration go ahead, that could be even worse. The Sandinistas may go to Castro for help, and you could see the conflict enlarged. If Nicaragua decides to attack Honduras, what do we do then, send in U.S. troops?"

All the Administration can say in response to such challenges is that it hopes things won't work out the way Pezzullo fears. The Administration also claims that the United States did show patience and forbearance toward the Sandinistas and tried on several occasions—notably during an August 1981 trip by Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders—to negotiate a trade with the Sandinistas: they would stop aiding rebels in El Salvador and stop building up its military forces to threatening proportions, and the United States would stop helping anti-Sandinista rebels and would expand U.S.-Nicaraguan aid and trade. The Nicaraguans failed to take up the offer, continued fomenting revolution in the region, maintained their build-up, and progressively limited the freedom of the Nicaraguan people.

Some Administration officials say it takes "willful blindness" not to understand the Reagan case, but in fact it is widely misunderstood in Congress and the country—not the least because the Administration has sold its policy badly. An initial white paper documenting Soviet bloc aid to El Salvador rebels through Nicaragua and Cuba was ridiculed, so the Administration has practically quit trying to expose Nicaraguan complicity in spreading revolution. Except for Kirkpatrick, few Administration officials have made much effort to document growing Nicaraguan cooperation with and support for the Soviet Union. The Nicaraguans, meanwhile, have convinced much of America and the world that the onus for their antidemocratic and pro-Communist tilt belongs in the United States.

AS ADMINISTRATION officials explain it, "we have maximum and minimum goals now. The minimum goal is to provide the Nicaraguan government with a powerful incentive to enter negotiations that will lead to cessation of their destabilization of neighboring countries. Everything else has failed. We tried bribing them with economic assistance. We tried bilateral, multilateral, and regional negotiations. Now we are trying something else." The "something else," obviously, is paramilitary pressure. According to this official, the "maximum hope" of the Administration is not that the rebels will topple the Sandinistas directly, but that "pressure could produce splits in the junta" and demands from within for elections to resolve the differences. This official assumes that the hardline left would lose.

The Administration hopes most of all that guerrilla pressure will scare the Sandinistas into negotiations—such as those being promoted by Venezuela—resulting in a regional noninterference, nonaggression agreement. But at the moment there is real doubt whether Congress will let the Administration pursue its pressure policy.

Some Administration officials are in a mood to confront Congress. For example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., said that "the Nicaraguan question is of ultimate importance. It confronts us in the starkest kind of way with the question of whether we are prepared to resist determined efforts by Marxist-Leninists to conquer other countries by force. If we can't use American power in this case, which is so clear-cut, there is going to be a general assumption in the world that the United States can't use power anyplace. I believe we ought to confront the Congress on this basis—support us or take responsibility for a Communist victory in Central America."

The stakes in Central America probably are just as high as Kirkpatrick claims, but there ought to be a better way for the Administration to fight. It should develop a fully defensible policy and defend it forcefully in public. Unless the Administration can get the country behind it, it cannot win votes in Congress. And to win support in the country, the Administration needs to persuade people that it is promoting democracy in Central America. It can't do that by arming Somocistas.

**MORTON KONDRACKE**

The fury of the Posse Comitatus.

# RENEGADE JUSTICE

TWO U.S. MARSHALS were shot and killed recently, and a third critically wounded, when they tried to arrest a convicted tax evader in Medina, North Dakota. Five people were arrested and charged with murder. A sixth (the man the marshals originally sought) is still at large. All belong to one of the strangest organizations in America, the Posse Comitatus.

Until the North Dakota shootings, the Posse Comitatus was among the most obscure of the cranky, sometimes dangerous groups that inhabit the extreme right of the American political spectrum. Its Latin name refers to an old common law concept; loosely translated, the term means "power of the people." It has members scattered across the country (perhaps a thousand are active, principally in the West and Midwest), but it is not nationally organized, and it has no single leader. Many of its members are so heavily armed that they seem to be successors of the Minutemen, the pioneering exemplar of armed right-wing resistance of two decades ago. Some are tax resisters—"illegal tax protestors," in the jargon of the Internal Revenue Service—but the Posse is not strictly a tax protest group. What passes for a world view among many



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of its members is the wilted right-wing conspiracy theory that a cabal of bankers and anonymous insiders is manipulating global events. But such a view is not a condition for membership. The group's sole official policy is simply resistance to all state and national government. County law, Posse members hold, is the highest legitimate authority—another notion derived from their idiosyncratic obsession with common law. They are hyper-libertarians, angry and antisocial.

THE POSSE'S CONTEMPT is broad enough to encompass everything from the federal alphabet agencies to the state inspector of weights and measures who certifies a butcher's scale. They regard gun laws, state and federal taxes, licenses to fish or hunt or drive, and the national speed limit as intolerable usurpations of individual liberty. For most Posse members this is not merely a philosophical matter. Many carry guns, and during the mid-1970s, Posse members participated in at least four serious incidents involving weapons or force.

In Stanfield, Oregon, seven Posse members tried to settle a property dispute in which an elderly couple claimed to have been swindled in a land deal years earlier. The seven seized a potato-packing shed, in the belief that by holding the property for twenty-four hours they could claim possession by common law. Armed with rifles, pistols, Molotov cocktails, and baseball bats, they held out for eleven hours before finally surrendering to police when they learned that they had mistakenly occupied the wrong property. They were convicted on charges including riot and armed trespass. In Stockton, California, Posse members tried to block enforcement of a court order that allowed union organizers to enter private fields. There was a scuffle, and a sheriff's deputy was wounded by a shotgun. One Posse member was convicted of armed assault. In Wisconsin, Posse members forcibly held prisoner an I.R.S. agent who had tried to question one of them. They interrogated the agent and photographed him. One member was convicted of assault. Also in Wisconsin, a Posse member used a citizens' band radio to call for help after he had been arrested by a highway patrolman. Six other members, some armed with semiautomatic rifles, arrived and overpowered the patrolman. The man who called for help received a seven-year sentence for assault.

Posse members have printed bogus "Universal Sportsman Licenses" which are supposed to replace hunting and fishing permits. They have tried to claim squatters' rights on national forest land and in state parks in the West. They carry meaningless badges that resemble sheriffs' shields. Armed, and with insignia on their cars and pickup trucks, they have patrolled rural roads. They have harassed government officials with common law property liens and with belligerent questionnaires. (Their "public servants questionnaire," which the I.R.S. agent in Wisconsin was forced to answer, includes these questions: "Has public servant ever employed an alias or assumed name? Has he ever been employed outside of government or outside of tax-supported agency such as a welfare bureau, a government school, etc.? Name of private person who suggested that this investigation be made? Was private person paid for turning in the name of taxpayer? How much was he paid?")

Much of this is pure thuggery. Yet most Posse members are utterly sincere, and no one is manipulating them. The Posse is perhaps the only group on the extreme fringe right for which the cause is clearly more important than the ego or the bank account of a leader. Indeed, the Posse has no discernible leader, and only the vaguest structure. Michael Beach, a retired machinist from Portland, Oregon, is thought to have founded the Posse in 1969. Yet there is no evidence that he ever exerted or tried to exert much control over the group. The Posse has no national headquarters, no executive board, no letterhead. In two years of investigating the radical right, I have never come across a Posse Comitatus booth at a convention or even a central mailing address for the group. There are loosely organized state branches in Oregon, California, Wisconsin, and Missouri, but the Posse consists mostly of local bands among friends and acquaintances. A typical Posse meeting involves eight or ten men sitting around a kitchen table, complaining of injustice and planning to exercise rights that, by law, they don't have. Recruitment is entirely by word of mouth and personal contact. For that reason, the group is unusually difficult to infiltrate. The Posse seeks no publicity; until the shootings in February, the popular media virtually ignored it. The group holds no marches, stages no rallies, does no politicking. And though its members are true individualists, there are some consistencies among them.

A TYPICAL MEMBER is white, but perhaps not reflexively racist. Though he may be a "minister" in the Life Science Bible Church (a discredited tax-evasion scam), his real religious views are probably deep and bedrock fundamentalist. He lives in a rural area, and probably grew up in the country. He finds the suburbs cluttered and the city oppressive, because wherever people congregate in great numbers there are too many rules to regulate them. He is unlikely to have finished high school, yet he may be eccentrically well read, especially in common law principles and the American Revolution. (I know one Posse member who reduced the term of his jail sentence for a tax conviction by teaching a prison course on the U.S. Constitution.) His heroes are Andrew Jackson and Thomas Jefferson. He is probably self-employed in some manual labor: mechanic, farmer, repairman. The odds are that he had a series of brushes with authority that may include resisting an officer or willful failure to file a tax return. Despite his police record, he owns several guns. He came to the Posse from some other extreme right-wing group, such as the National Alliance to Keep and Bear Arms, or a tax protest organization. He isn't likely to have served well in the military, if he has served at all; the idea of enforced discipline, unquestioning obedience, sits poorly with him.

He is immovable, clutching a few verities with a tenacity that surpasses logic. When threatened or disturbed—the



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record is clear on this—he will act regardless of the consequences. I have known several active Posse members, and every one seemed unhappy and pitiable, constantly poised on the brink of another stupid, pointless act that could only mean more trouble. By nature, they are renegades, and they can come to no good end.

"We will obey no unconstitutional statute," read an open letter from a Posse member in California to his elected representatives. "We will discontinue paying income and Social Security taxes. We will remain armed regardless. . . ."

**PHILLIP FINCH**

Phillip Finch's book on the radical right, *God, Guns, and Guts*, will be published this month by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

A nasty outbreak of Mahatma-bashing.

# TRUE GANDHI

A FILM about the life of Mohandas K. Gandhi is a popular success, and certain intellectuals are disturbed. The film is what Hollywood used to call, in the days of Paul Muni, a "bio-pic," and it has the strengths and weaknesses of its genre. What concerns the current gaggle of critics, however, is not the quality of the film but the possibility that its subject may be seen, in Richard Grenier's words, "as having a direct bearing on courses of action now open to us." The real target of these critics, therefore, is not *Gandhi* but Gandhi. The March *Commentary* devotes fourteen pages to Grenier's exercise in Gandhi-bashing—a nasty piece of work, so repellent that there is nothing to do with it but pick it up with a pair of tongs and drop it in the trash. Less dismissible is to find the Mahatma portrayed as little better than a terrorist in THE NEW REPUBLIC, and by a historian as eminent as Elie Kedourie ("False Gandhi," TNR, March 21). Kedourie is so anxious to combat the "corrupt gospel" he discerns in the movie that he seriously misrepresents both the facts and the spirit of Gandhi's life.

The most glaring example of Kedourie's falseness to the record is his account of the Amritsar massacre of April 13, 1919. "As is well known," he writes, "a crowd assembled in an enclosed space in Amritsar was subjected on General Dyer's orders, without due warning, to a sustained fusillade in which hundreds were killed and thousands wounded." So far so good, or almost (there was no warning, not no "due" warning). But then Kedourie goes on to say that "the impression that this was an unprovoked atrocity perpetrated against a jolly holiday crowd" is false, that Amritsar was in turmoil "precisely as a result of Gandhi's campaign of passive disobedience," and that "the particular crowd in question was being harangued and incited by orators who clearly did not possess Gandhi's skill in simultaneously arousing and restraining an audience." Now it happens that we have an unimpeachable account of this event, from a source that had little to gain from exaggerating British culpability: the *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab, etc.*, published by His Majesty's Stationery Office in 1920. The burden of the report of the Hunter Committee (its chairman was Lord Hunter, a senior Scottish judge) is that the massacre was indeed an unprovoked atrocity. There had been no "disobedience," although a week earlier, at Gandhi's instigation, a *hartal*, or day of prayer, had brought all economic activity throughout the country to a halt for twenty-four hours. This annoyed the authorities, but it was perfectly legal. Amritsar had been calm for two days before the massacre. The day before that there had been a brief but nasty riot in which at least two bank employees were killed. (Their deaths could have been prevented, the Hunter Committee found, "if the officer in charge . . . had done his duty.") The proximate cause of that riot, according to the Hunter Report, was not anything Gandhi did but rather the Punjabi government's decision to deport two local leaders of the Indian National Congress, who had been instrumental in preventing any violence up to that point. April 13 was indeed a holiday—*Vaisakhi*, the beginning of the Hindu New Year—and the purpose of the gathering was to celebrate it. With respect to Kedourie's rabble-rousing orators, the Hunter Report says simply, "There is no evidence as to the nature of the address to which the audience was listening." The crowd was quiet until the shooting began. "The firing was individual and not volley firing," notes the Hunter Report. General Dyer's men aimed so carefully that the 1,650 rounds they fired inflicted 1,516 casualties.

"IN THE LIGHT of this massacre," Kedourie writes, "the question arises whether Gandhi's methods led to consequences much different from those of the provocative tactics adopted by avowed terrorists who hope to spread disaffection and rebelliousness among the population by goading the authorities into heavy-handed repression." In fact, Gandhi sought to appeal to the better natures of the British, not to goad them, and the fact that they could produce a document like the Hunter Report suggests that his faith was not wholly misplaced. Kedourie calls Gandhi's method "passive disobedience," no doubt because this term makes it sound at once weak and surly. He writes that the method "is not a particularly elevated or virtuous political weapon" because it "depends on rousing and inciting a crowd to break the law, and a roused crowd may become indistinguishable from a mob." This is a grotesque parody of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, which was a spiritual as well as a political exercise, and which required discipline, training, and fearless calm. *Satyagraha* had nothing to do with flouting the law "at



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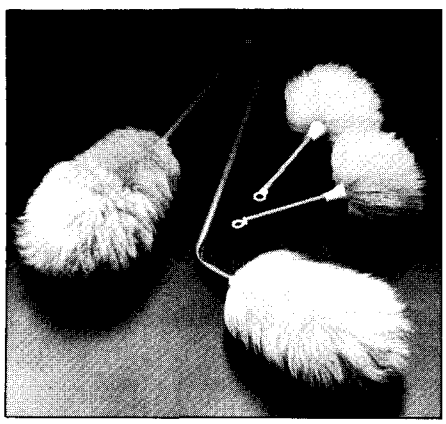
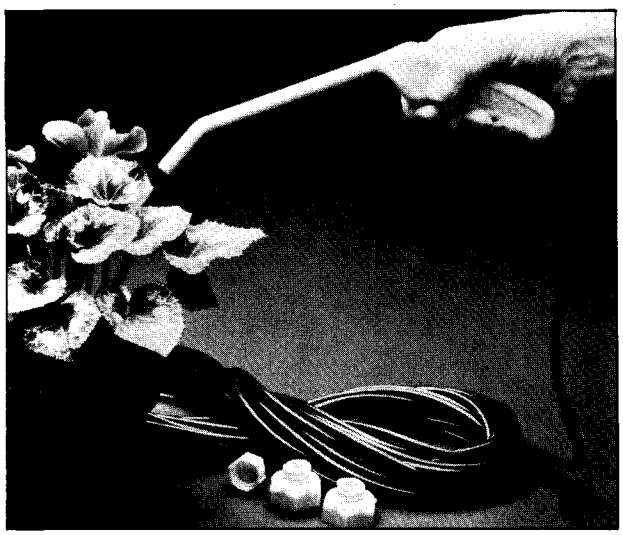
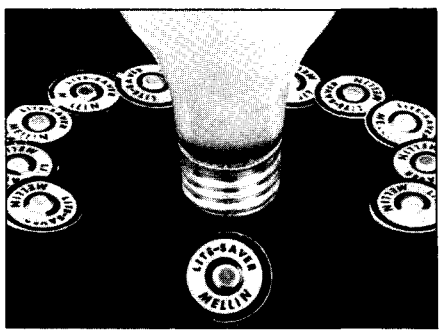


## Watering Whiz



Do your houseplants run you ragged, back and forth, trip after trip, watering can in hand? There is an easier way: with an indoor garden hose you can water them all in a single trip. Think of the steps waiting to be saved! This 50′ (that is a lot of reach) vinyl hose comes complete with a set of four adaptors that readily attach to most indoor and outdoor faucets. From there you just take the water where you want it, an easy-control handle allows you to turn a splashless stream of water on and off as needed. This indoor hose comes with a snap-in misting attachment, so after you water the roots you can spray the foliage and wash away the dust accumulation that impairs a plant's health as well as its beauty. The indoor garden hose kit costs just **$11.00** ($1.95) #A681. It will make your watering as simple as turning on the faucet. Two for **$19.00** ($2.95) #A6812.

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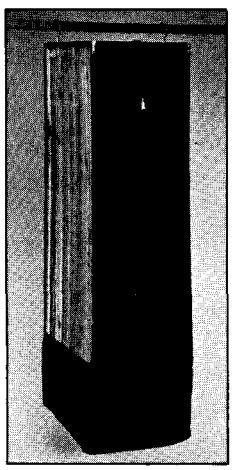

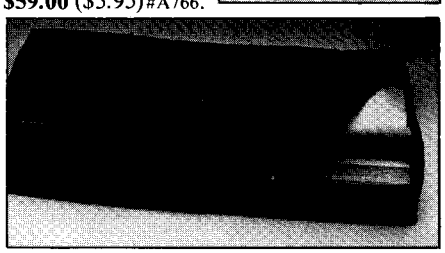

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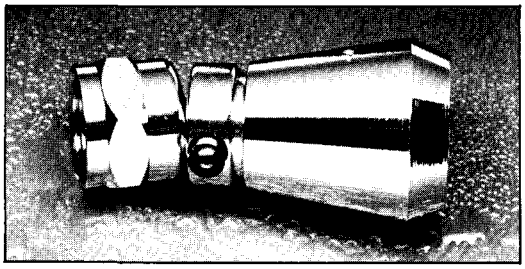

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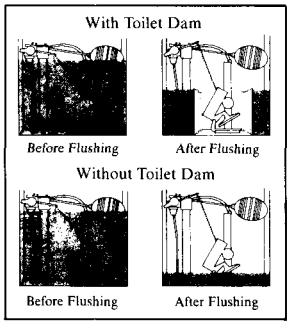


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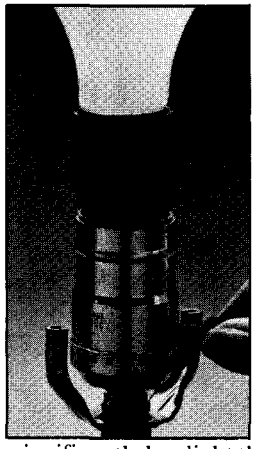

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one's whim"; indeed, Gandhi wrote, it "is not a state of lawlessness and license but presupposes a law-abiding spirit combined with self-restraint." Gandhi took the social contract very seriously. He accepted imprisonment precisely because he thought the British had a right to punish him if he disobeyed even an unjust law; and when his followers demanded amnesty for rioters, he wrote, "It is a breach of religious duty to endeavor to secure the release of those who have committed deeds of violence." Nor did Gandhi's method have anything to do with passivity, which he abhorred above all else. In Gujarati, *satyagraha* means "truth-firmness"; and while he accepted the translation "civil disobedience," because of its Thoreauvian pedigree, he never liked "passive resistance." His political technique, wrote George Orwell in a critical but respectful essay, "was a sort of nonviolent warfare, a way of defeating the enemy without hurting him and without feeling or arousing hatred."

It's too limiting to call Gandhi simply a pacifist, for his creed required great physical and moral courage, and he had no patience with what would today be called neutralism. In Orwell's words, "He did not—indeed, since his whole political life centered round a struggle for national independence, he could not—take the sterile and dishonest line of pretending that in every war both sides are exactly the same and it makes no difference who wins. Nor did he, like most Western pacifists, specialize in avoiding awkward questions"—such as the question of what to do about Hitler. Gandhi had no direct experience of totalitarianism, but he had some inkling that it was unlike previous tryannies, and that it presented an unnerving challenge to his beliefs. Well before most people in the West, Gandhi recognized that "the German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history," and he wrote: "If there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified." To be sure, he added that he did not believe in any war. But at the time—November 1938, a few weeks after Munich—this was a good deal further than any European statesman was willing to go.

Kedourie mocks as an "empty posture" what he calls Gandhi's "exhortation to the German Jews to pacify and disarm Hitler by offering no resistance to his persecutions." This is not quite fair: needless to say, Gandhi did not recommend "no resistance," and the kind of resistance he did recommend might even have had some effect in the immediate aftermath of Hitler's takeover. But by 1938 it was too late for nonviolent resistance to Nazism, and the best Gandhi could say for it was that "if one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered, he or they cannot be worse off than now." Martin Buber wrote a long, passionate reply, rightly rebuking Gandhi for comparing the plight of the European Jews to that of the Indians in South Africa. "I am forced to withstand the evil in the world just as the evil within myself," Buber wrote. "I can only strive not to have to do so by force. I do not want force. But if there is no other way of preventing the evil destroying the good, I trust I shall use force and give myself up into God's hands." Would Gandhi have condemned him? I doubt it, for on the question of force *in extremis* Gandhi was divided against himself. Certainly he did not regard violence as the ultimate evil. "I do believe that where there is a choice only between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence," he had written the year after the Amritsar massacre. "I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonor." If Gandhi could imagine the use of arms against the comparatively civilized, numerically inferior British, how much easier it should have been to imagine it against the "hideous, terrible, and terrifying" violence of the Nazis! Gandhi struggled honestly with the Hitler question, which is the most difficult question of all for anyone of his views. If his answer was not exactly empty, it was bleak and blinkered, and he seemed aware that he was asking to be taken on faith.

KEDOURIE THINKS Gandhi was "sentimental about poverty, as though the poor, simply by virtue of being poor, enjoy a moral superiority over those who are not poor." This is nonsense. Gandhi's own voluntary poverty was mostly a religious discipline, a practice not unknown even in the mysterious West. He recognized that it was not for everyone. "Complete renunciation of one's possessions is a thing which very few even among ordinary folk are capable of," he said. "All that can legitimately be expected of the wealthy class is that they should hold their riches and talents in trust and use them for the service of the society." But he saw nothing ennobling about forced want. "A starving man thinks first of satisfying his hunger before anything else," he wrote. "He will sell his liberty and all for the sake of getting a morsel of food. Such is the position of millions of the people of India. For them liberty, God, and all such words are merely letters put together without the slightest meaning."

The "anti-industrial recipes" with which he proposed to lift those millions out of their degradation were not as foolish as Nehru thought and Kedourie still thinks. Gandhi did not "despise" what Kedourie calls (in a phrase seemingly calculated to picture the Mahatma as a kind of Hindu Khomeini) the "Satanic inventiveness of the West." He was crazy about the Singer sewing machine, for example. "[T]here is a romance about the device itself," he wrote, in one of his most charming passages. "Singer saw his wife laboring over the tedious process of sewing and seaming and simply out of his love for her he devised the sewing machine in order to save her from unnecessary labor. . . . The sewing machine had love at its back." Big factories were fine for the West, Gandhi thought, but India would be better off concentrating on small-scale agriculture and industry—what is today called appropriate technology. A growing number of developmental economists are beginning to agree with him.

This is not to say that Gandhi's ideas on industrialism,



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any more than his ideas on politics, were based purely on utilitarian calculations. What drew all his ideas together was faith in God, something that sophisticated Westerners find virtually impossible not to view patronizingly. Gandhi was not, as Kedourie thinks, first and foremost a politician; he was first and foremost a *karma yogi*. The issue of political effectiveness was important to him, but less so than it is to his admirers and detractors in the West. He regarded his political work as a facet of his religious work, and in his view *satyagraha*, as a religious discipline, was its own justification. It may be going too far to say, as Orwell does, that Gandhi's teachings "make sense only on the assumption that God exists and that the world of solid objects is an illusion to be escaped from," but his career cannot be fully understood without recognizing that these were indeed his beliefs. It is too soon to know if he deserves to be classed with the great religious leaders of history. But it is not too soon to say that it would be as mistaken to judge him solely on the basis of the subsequent history of India as it would be, say, to judge Luther solely on the basis of the subsequent history of Germany.

In the end, Gandhi judged himself a failure, and so, of course, does Kedourie. The rest of us are under no obligation to agree. Gandhi thought he had failed because of the dreadful communal bloodletting that accompanied Indian independence. Kedourie's reasons are more obscure. "Gandhi wished India to be rid of alien rule and to govern itself," he writes. "However, willing the end, he was too squeamish or naive (or hypocritical) to will the means." I'm not sure what "means" Kedourie is referring to—violence, perhaps. If not, it's unclear how he would have preferred to have the Indians go about seeking their independence. In any case, Gandhi did "will the means," and the means was *satyagraha*.

IF HE OVERESTIMATED the universality of his method's political utility, that does not amount to much in the catalog of twentieth-century political sins. It is true, as Kedourie is not the first to argue, that Gandhi's method would have been a poor match for Nazism or Stalinism. In the absence of some access to publicity, the political effect of *satyagraha* is reduced, in Buber's phrase, to "a martyrdom cast to the winds." But there is no such thing as a political method, violent or nonviolent, that is adaptable to every political circumstance. Gandhi's method would not work today in El Salvador or Zaire or the Soviet Union or Iran, and probably not in South Africa, where, under a milder tyranny than now prevails, Gandhi got his start. It did work, however, even in diluted form, in the American South. It might yet stand an outside chance in Poland, where something eerily like it made the Poles, for a time, a free people. And it would work very well, to the honor of both Palestinians and Israelis, on the West Bank.

Gandhi was a man of his time and place, and in his time and place his method worked. Part of the reason, to be sure, was the ultimate decency of his opponents—their "veritable weakness for Gandhi," in Kedourie's contemptuous phrase. But as the history of other former British colonies demonstrates, this was a necessary but not sufficient condition.

Gandhi was a revolutionary, and for the last two centuries revolution and democracy have not gone well together anywhere in the world. Gandhi's movement was the great exception, because there was something innately democratic in Gandhi's method. Unlike terrorism or guerrilla warfare or conspiratorial vanguardism—all of which would have been possible in British India—*satyagraha* on a national scale requires the active participation of large masses of people. That participation, moreover, cannot be coerced; it can only be entered into voluntarily. The discipline of the *satyagrahi* necessarily must be grounded in calm, courageous self-restraint, never in ungovernable passion. So Kedourie is wrong to say that Gandhi's method was just another political weapon, no more virtuous or elevated than any other. It *was* more virtuous and elevated, because it encouraged, indeed required, democratic habits of mind: not only self-restraint and voluntary association, but also respect for the feelings and persons of one's political opponents, moderation in word and thought, a belief in compromise, and an understanding that political means and political ends cannot be separated without grave risk to both.

Some of this still lingers in independent India—not much, but some. The spinning wheel still adorns the flag, but no one puts much stock in specifically Gandhian notions. The halo has faded—more quickly, alas, than the sanctimony that went with it. India has proved itself capable of bullying its neighbors, kowtowing to its creditors, and trampling upon the rights of its people. Where virtue and vice are concerned, in other words, it is a rather ordinary country—but ordinary, for the most part, in a democratic way, which is not ordinary at all. Except for the brief period of what the present Prime Minister, now chastened, was pleased to call the Emergency, India has enjoyed free elections, a free press, an unfettered cultural life, and an independent judiciary—legacies of British rule, yes, but also of Gandhi's method. (Pakistan, for example, has none of these things.) Despite communal tensions, despite appalling outbursts like the recent bloodshed in Assam (so like the partition-era violence Gandhi struggled to dampen), India has not fallen apart; it remains a united, secular democratic state in which 82 million Muslims and 530 million Hindus live side by side and, for the most part, in peace. These would be noteworthy accomplishments for any country; for a vast third world country whose people must contend with 15 different languages (and 1,500 dialects), a dizzying array of religious and political fanaticisms, the pervasive divisions of caste and Untouchability, a literacy rate of 40 percent, and one of the lowest standards of living on earth, they are more than noteworthy. They are a miracle, and, as everybody knows, miracles are wrought by saints. Gandhi a failure? Gandhi a humbug? The world needs more such failures, more such humbugs.

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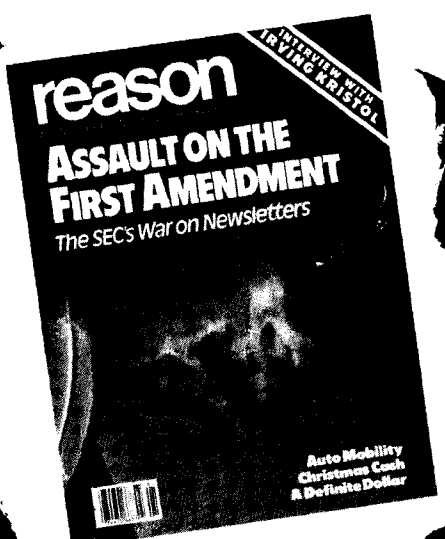


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Why the Democrats would be better off losing in '84.

# SPARE THE ROD, SPOIL THE PARTY

## BY HENRY FAIRLIE

AS THINGS STAND NOW, I can see no reason why any Democrat, apart from the candidates themselves, should wish his party to win the Presidential election in 1984.

Let me begin by making clear what I am not saying. I am not saying that things cannot or will not change. I am not saying how I think anyone should vote next year. I am not saying that I would like to see President Reagan or any other Republican win the election. I am not saying that it would be desirable to support a third party or independent candidate, as THE NEW REPUBLIC supported John Anderson in 1980. I am not saying that some special circumstance (such as the prospect of a large number of openings on the Supreme Court) may not make it imperative to support any Democrat, however undistinguished. Perhaps I should emphasize above all that, in looking beyond the next election to 1988, I am not saying that the Democrats should wait for Edward Kennedy.

I am merely saying that the Democratic Party today is in such a state that for the good of its soul and the sake of its future, it would be better if a Democrat did not recapture the White House next year. If I were in charge of the fortunes of the Democratic Party at the moment, I would concentrate on winning back the Senate, on increasing the party's majority in the House of Representatives, and on strengthening its hold on the governorships and state legislatures, before being much interested in whether it wins the Presidential election nineteen months from now.

I am arguing from what I believe to be the interests of the Democratic Party. But what of the interests of the country, it may be asked, and of the alliance of which America is the leader? My answer is that I despise the present Administration more than I fear it. As long as the Democrats are powerful somewhere else in the political system—and the American voters are skillful at producing that corrective and that balance when they think it is needed—I see no particular reason to fear a second Republican term in the White House. I fear much more that the Democratic Party will return to the White House before it is ready to govern from there, and that, squandering its opportunity yet again, it will forfeit, perhaps for the rest of this century, the chance to reverse the narrow-minded, dry-hearted, pinch-souled conservative mood that now prevails in America.

It is because I believe that the only hope for America lies with a restored Democratic Party that I ask whether it has been in the wilderness long enough. We can survive the next five years or so, even with the alarms of Star Wars. What makes me anxious is the more distant future.

In 1984 it will be thirty-two years since Eisenhower won the White House, and for twenty of those years the Republicans will have held the Presidency. The Democrats have broken into this dominance only twice—with Kennedy's victory in 1960, reinforced by Johnson's in 1964, and with Carter's in 1976—and it cannot be said that they have acquitted themselves well. In fact the Democrats themselves have done more than the Republicans, more even than the conservatives, to make many ordinary people impatient with them. The condition of the Democratic Party today does not suggest that it would do any better if it occupied the White House between 1985 and 1989. For who can doubt that such a Presidency would last only one term; that at the end of it no one would know any better than at the beginning what the Democrats stand for; and that the right wing would then be poised, after four years of regathering itself in opposition, to sweep to an even larger, even more conservative, victory than in 1980? Although the candidates themselves do not seem to me the most important factor, they are naturally where all thoughts of the 1984 election begin. No Democratic candidate who has entered the lists so far, or is expected to enter them, can excite anyone's rational interest for long, quite apart from exciting any impulsive enthusiasm or even much genuine hope that he will govern persuasively. It is hard to believe that even those whose duty it will be to place their names in nomination at the Democratic Convention will acclaim any one of them as a wise and indomitable leader of the nation.

The renovation of Walter Mondale, though not taking quite as long as the renovation of the South Bronx, has been going on for some time. In fact, we ought perhaps to use for him the word we reserve for a particular kind of renovation in our cities: gentrification. It is true that he cares about the unfortunate and the downtrodden, and that he has found a new rhetoric—by Edward Kennedy out of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party—to give more vibrant expression to his undoubtedly sincere concerns. In this mood today, before captive audiences of Democrats or



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union members, Mondale is a walking, talking Statue of Liberty. "Give me your tired, your poor,/Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free." This rhetoric may stir his self-selected audiences, and might even win him the nomination; it will not win him the election, any more than the similar rhetoric of Edward Kennedy would have done in 1980, and no one knows that better than Mondale. Hence the gentrification.

We all know what is meant by gentrification. Take a run-down terrace house that would have sold for $30,000 in 1968, knock down a wall or two inside, replace the old window frames, paint the front door a pastel mauve or olive, put a wooden tub of geraniums on either side, and sell it to somebody "upscale" for $210,000 in 1984. That is exactly all the renovation of Walter Mondale that we will be able to observe if he should ever have the opportunity to turn from winning the nomination to winning the election in the suburbs even of the Northeast and Middle West, where, however soured the voters are by Mr. Reagan's performance, they show very little inclination to be persuaded by a gentrified liberal and party hack. It is an unfortunate fact that he makes good causes seem a bore and himself an irrelevance.

So a second claim is made for Mondale: at least he knows the ropes of government. The metaphor always seems to me unfortunate, since the boxer who best knows the ropes is the one who is being battered into submission against them, as Reagan would surely batter Mondale. Attorney General of Minnesota for four years, a forgotten thirteen years as a United States Senator in the shadow of Hubert Humphrey, and Vice President for four years, during which, we are now sedulously being told, he made something of that office (a claim that was equally made for Spiro Agnew, until it was found that what he was making out of it was a bundle); this is not a political record that, in the absence of more convincing reasons for voting for Mondale, is likely to persuade many voters of the virtue of knowing the Washington ropes.

JOHN GLENN is the media candidate, in the most ominous sense of the word. The media and no one else of any weight is trying to project him. In a classic insider's column in *The Washington Post* on March 30, David Broder wrote of the political importance of the Gridiron Dinner, a juvenile occasion at which Washington journalists and politicians preen themselves in each other's company. "Personal relations of the kind that are fostered on such light-hearted evenings," wrote Broder, "really are essential to making government function." In the middle of this cockeyed nonsense, and true to its character, Broder then observed: "Senator John Glenn of Ohio, the Democratic speaker of the evening, laughed his reputation as a tedious orator away—maybe for good—by turning the President and Vice President—to say nothing of a distinguished political columnist of *The New York Times*—into helpless straightmen for a monologue that can fairly be called a triumph." Observe that "maybe for good," as if one trivial performance before the elect of Washington, on their most self-congratulatory evening, can turn a Buckeye sow's ear into a Presidential silk purse.

But David Broder's ecstasy over "the special ambience" of the Gridiron Dinner, at which "politicians and reporters . . . manage to rise above themselves," is only the most flagrant example, so far, of the media's attempt to get Glenn to the launching pad for takeoff. No one will deny that Lt. Col. John Glenn, D.F.C. (eight times), Air Medal (eighteen clusters), is a legitimate hero of the Space Age. But putting him into orbit as a Presidential candidate will be rather like the Russians putting the dog Laika into space, and should call forth the same protests from those who believe that we do not have the right to abuse harmless and trusting household animals.

The media is manufacturing Glenn as a Presidential candidate out of the very political weightlessness that should disqualify him. He is one of those politicians who in a different set of circumstances from those existing in his own state might just as well have become a candidate for the other party. What is certain is that if the media succeeds in nominating and then electing him, it will not be because he's a Democrat. His appeal and his policies will neither clarify nor strengthen what the Democratic Party stands for or ought to stand for now. He will have been elected solely because of the appeal implicit in the headline on a recent cover of *New York* magazine—JOHN GLENN: THE RIGHT STUFF?—and we may as well prepare for the day when the saving question mark is dropped.

THE OPPORTUNISM of Gary Hart makes one recall what one English politician once said of political ambition: that it should, like the cuffs of a gentleman's shirt, show a little below the sleeves of his jacket, but not too much. Hart's opportunism shoots out three inches or so below his jacket's sleeves. Smart and agile and facile, he is in many ways tailored (the word springs naturally to mind) for a contemporary political campaign: the campaign of the media consultant and the pollster and the direct mail wizard, and above all the campaign guided by computerized calculations of how not to upset anybody. In place of a vision is a fast-thinking grasp at fad and trend. The neoconservatives have won a great deal of publicity for themselves; what a felicitous thought, then, to invent oneself as a neoliberal. Technology is a neutral and apolitical answer to the problems of industry and the economy; how ingenious, then, to be known as an Atari Democrat, until someone suggested that the Atari Democrats should ponder the fact that Atari is decamping to Asia with 1,700 jobs, which rather spoils the image of technology as a deus ex (video) machina. Hart runs so hard to appear up to date that, when he catches up with it, he is as out of date as last year's *Time* covers. One can put the question bluntly: what would the Democratic Party discover of itself—and it desperately needs to discover its contemporary identity—by assisting Gary Hart to the White House?

These are the three men most persistently mentioned as contenders. One might comb through the rest of the names, most of them worthy men in the offices they now



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hold, asking why they presume to be President. Two other Senators are putting themselves forward: Alan Cranston, who is experienced and thoughtful, and Ernest Hollings, who is civilized and charming. (Dale Bumpers recently withdrew from the race.) Each is the kind of man who would raise the quality and competence of any legislative body. But Cranston is a one-issue (arms control) candidate in a multi-issue time, and Hollings is a total stranger to the national scene. The Presidential ambitions of the remaining candidate, Reubin Askew, were ignited by one successful keynote speech at a Democratic convention; that fire having been lit, no doubt it will not die. But it would be a very daring observer who predicted for him a career in national politics very different from that of Harold Stassen in the Republican Party: the perennial, never seriously considered, candidate. Askew and Hollings are both former Southern governors. One has the sneaking suspicion that they were emboldened to join the race more by the anomalous success in 1976 of another former Southern governor than by any large qualifications of their own; and one suspects as well that they would mistake the White House for a statehouse. Given the unconvincing appearances of even the dark horses, one is left wondering why the Democratic Party does not run a ticket of Eugene McCarthy and Mo Udall, who might at least persuade the nation that the business of America is jokes.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

If we turn from the candidates to policy, we find lists instead of visions. I do not believe that an opposition party needs a program, a catalog of what it will do in every conceivable field, given in meaningless detail. The voters are intelligent enough to know that the position papers of a candidate describe the very positions he will perforce abandon in office. Hugh Gaitskell elaborated his position on so many issues when he was leader of the opposition in the British general election of 1959, that Harold Macmillan, who easily trounced him, said afterward that Gaitskell's trouble had been that he behaved as if he were prime minister even before he had been elected. He thus incurred all the disadvantages of being in office while enjoying none of its advantages; and it is indeed a little ridiculous when a Presidential candidate defines his policy in such detail—McGovern? Carter?—that he almost seems to be running more on his "record" than the President in office.

Far more important and urgent than drawing up a program is the need for the Democratic Party and its Presidential candidate to have some clear idea of the people whom it is seeking to represent. Let us look for illustration at the elections of 1928 and 1932.

By 1928 there had been a long succession of Republican Presidents that had been unimpressively interrupted now and then by the Democrats, and then quite impressively interrupted by Woodrow Wilson, to the extent that it could be said in 1928 (as it might be said now) that the Republicans were the Presidential party. After filling in time with two dud candidates in 1920 and 1924, the Democrats then made the brave choice of Al Smith—Catholic, wet, Tammany—a choice that ensured that they would lose the 1928 election, but that prepared the ground for twenty years of continuous and commanding Democratic rule after 1932. One can only be grateful in retrospect that the Democratic victory was delayed in 1928, and this can tell us something about the present weakness of the Democrats.

There are two points to be made. The Democratic Party was not ready to assume office, and it was not ready in a special and critical sense. The mass of immigrant (and children of immigrant) voters in the cities were by then only beginning to feel their power, and to arrange themselves behind the Democratic Party in order in turn to make that power felt. The many studies of voting behavior in Chicago in those years, for example, show with what complexity during the 1920s the multiple ethnic groups shifted about, trying to find the ground from which they could exert their new political weight in a sustained man-



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ner, until at last they formed themselves behind the brilliant Anton Cermak. But in 1928 that realignment was incomplete, and so would have been a Democratic victory.

Too much is made of the New Deal "coalition" that F.D.R. put together after 1932, which was still strong enough to give Truman his victory sixteen years later. Parties draw their basic strength from below, rather from their leaders or establishments, a fact that much misguided American political science has managed to obscure. As a New York governor who could scarcely ignore Tammany, F.D.R. understood what was happening in the cities in the 1920s, and when he at last reached the White House, his political genius enabled him to weld the famous coalition that the Republicans and conservatives are still trying to dismantle today. But his initial opportunity was given to him less by his own political skill and intuition, less by the Democratic Party and its machines, than by a profound social and political movement of voters who felt themselves disenfranchised.

Those Democrats who are seriously interested in the future of their party should be ready to consider the fact, however unwelcome, that it is the Republicans who in recent years have been appealing to masses of voters who have considered themselves disenfranchised. It is the Republicans who have been appealing to "the silent majority," even to the extent of echoing F.D.R.'s appeal to "the forgotten man." The long pull of the Republicans back to power in the past twenty years has been based on this reach to the "middle Americans" who felt themselves left out by the Democrats' neglect.

Today there is no mass of voters who are shifting their ground to place themselves behind the Democratic Party. The result is what we see: a number of Democratic candidates who, with various degrees of emphasis, are trying to attract the support of various interest groups, which they hope to bind together into a fanciful "coalition." It is wholly to the point that these interest groups are usually identified and identify themselves as *minorities*, and it is precisely there that the analogy with the New Deal "coalition" can be seen today to be misleading and unprofitable. Beyond the appeasement of various minorities, the New Deal was addressed, first and foremost, to the *majority* in terms of their common citizenship. The genius of the New Deal was not the "coalition," but the appeal to the *majority sense* of the nation.

THE SECOND POINT helps us to judge more clearly the inadequacy of the Democratic candidates today. Whatever else may be said of the political contribution of F.D.R., the most important point to make in this context is that he had an astonishing sense of the nation. However shrewdly he moved to meet the needs of the farmers or the unemployed or the unions, of the Middle West or the South or any other region, of the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Slovaks, the Bulgars, and even of the artists and writers in the W.P.A., it was not in terms of a coalition of minorities that his impact was so dramatic and far-reaching. What he communicated was a sense of the nation, not divided against itself but united by a common citizenship to which his Administration's policies, as well as his own words, gave a meaning that ordinary people felt almost personally.

There can be many explanations of his personal sense of the nation, including that generous, aristocratic embrace which seemed to include everyone. But above all it was political, as it must be in America, perhaps more than elsewhere. America has no Throne; it has no Church. Where then does the nation exist, except in its politics and its government? In its national politics, above all, and its national government. *E pluribus unum.* Where is the *unum* outside the activity of the federal government? It is not in the states. (One thought that question had been settled long ago.) But it is also not in Wall Street, in the "private sector." There is no *unum*, by definition, in the market. Neither does the nation exist in those intermediary associations that are so fashionably touted these days. People may need those intermediary associations for much of their daily lives, and no one can sensibly question that the healthier they are, the better those lives will be. But it is not in them that the nation is to be found. Even more to the point, the New Deal understood one thing: that in a modern society the intermediary associations need the active support and constant intervention of the national government.

The one thing common to all the Democratic candidates today—renovated liberals, neoliberals, and "moderates" alike—is that they all talk of the national government as if it needs to be justified. What should be the role of government? one hears them ask. But government is not the sum of its roles. One would think from the way in which the candidates now talk of adding one or two more roles to government that it is a kind of table to which they would pull up one or two more chairs than the Republicans do. Government does, they say, a little more than what the


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Republicans think it should do; whereas to a Democrat (and to a democrat) the whole point should be, as F.D.R. knew, that government is. Government is, and so the nation is. Until the Democrats shift their whole rhetoric about government back to that simple proposition, they will only be confused in office and do not deserve it.

For all President Reagan's promise to restore the vigor of American foreign policy, and for all his poking about the world to find places of no very clear significance where he can give an impression of vigor, the fact is that the foreign policy of America can no more be called a national policy than it could under his predecessor; he has failed just as lamentably to create a national commitment to a policy that the people understand. This was predictable. If you dismantle the nation at home, there is no nation to act abroad. The Democratic candidates today whom I have heard under questioning are all pathetically weak on foreign policy, and there can be little doubt that, apart from the issue of the nuclear freeze (on which the ground could so easily be cut from under them), they would prefer to ignore foreign policy. Again, this is not surprising. Patching together "coalitions" of minorities that have a grievance against the present Administration—grievances that may not necessarily be carried to the ballot box at the election—they have no way of creating that majority sense of the nation that might support a coherent policy. The Republicans are dismantling the nation, the Democrats are proposing to patch it. In between, America is lost.

Returning to Walter Mondale, since at the moment he is leading the pack, it is worth recalling his mentor. Why do so many people today miss Hubert Humphrey? One reason is surely that no one can imagine a renovated Hubert Humphrey. No one can imagine Humphrey changing his style or his rhetoric to suit what the polls seem to demand of a candidate or what is said to be the mood of the country. But there is another reason. Humphrey had as all-embracing and generous a sense of the nation as did Roosevelt. He would not be guarding his words. When did Humphrey ever guard his words? He would not be out talking to the unemployed as unemployed, to the blacks as blacks, to the suburbs as Atari players, to the teachers as teachers, but to Americans as Americans, all of them. He would be talking to Americans as citizens, talking of their common concerns and the possibilities of common endeavor. He would not be talking of the "role" of government. "Your government," he would say, believing it, as F.D.R. believed it. Until the Democrats find another like Hubert, how can they have the heart to wish for office?


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# STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

## A Bit of Fluff, A Lot of Fizzle

*Max Dugan Returns*
(Twentieth-Century Fox)

*Britannia Hospital*
(United Artists)

Neil Simon's work may not prove to be immortal, but it certainly is classic. (*American Heritage Dictionary*: "3. Something considered to be typical or traditional.") He has mastered, in modern idiom, a kind of production that has been prized for about two centuries, first in the theater and latterly also in films: scripts that seize on the dilemmas and hungers of unexceptional people and, by means of credible but unlikely plots, magnify them into drama or comedy. Simon's chief trouble in the theater (I'm blithely ignoring box-office receipts) has been an inability to write unified plays; his screen work has taught him how to write organic scripts, rather than strings of sketches. He may be the first Broadway success to benefit, technically, from Hollywood experience. Further ignoring the Simon cash flow, which by now could have inundated several Swiss banks, I'd say that he still has trouble with authorial ventriloquism. He hasn't yet mastered the craft of letting his characters be funny in their own right; whatever their degree or station, they all sound like gag writers at a convention. If they're so funny (we wonder), why aren't they writing scripts like Simon and getting rich? Still, his powers of invention, which are astonishing, based on his powers of observation, which are conventional, continue to pour and pour, and, luckily for the kind of classicist he is, they continue to provide him with plots that inflate the commonplace.

Discomforting juncture is at the base of all comedy, and Simon swoops toward it like a hawk toward chickens. If a youngish widowed schoolteacher is starting a romance with a youngish widowed detective and if the teacher's long-lost father turns up, her old man has to be an ex-con on the lam from the police. If her fifteen-year-old son is a Little Leaguer who is learning to hit, the detective's fifteen-year-old son is a pitcher on the opposing team that faces him in the big game.

And don't forget the running gag. In this picture, for instance, the teacher's vehicle keeps getting stolen—first a car, then a motorbike. And the running gag needs a topper at the end. I'd recommend that schools of engineering, more than of drama, send their students to this film to see what careful blueprinting can accomplish.

All of which is to say, I hope, that I had a good time at *Max Dugan Returns*. I won't quote any of the better lines or situations: a Simon script is a one-time affair. Foreknowledge flattens fluff like this. The only real question is: Is the fluff fluffy? The answer here: Yes.

The performances help it to float. Marsha Mason, who has become to Simon what Sarah Bernhardt was to Sardou, again is his perfect interpreter in her customary role—the beleaguered, sexy, spirited, unstuffy but right-thinking gal. Matthew Broderick does nicely as her warm but wised-up son. Donald Sutherland, that comfortable chameleon who blends with any landscape (Los Angeles this time, if it matters), is the detective. And the long-lost father—longer-lost than in *I Ought to Be in Pictures*—is Jason Robards, unctuously sly, rumblingly affectionate. The four of them keep the carefully twisted plot full of just enough conviction. For instance, Mason speaks the very last line in exactly the right hush to cap the picture.

There and elsewhere she probably had the help of Herbert Ross, the director, who probably helped all the others and who kept the pace fast but not frantic. Ross is an old Simonizing hand who knows how to give these scripts the right polish.

*Britannia Hospital* is a serious film, and, at it, I had a rotten time. I was chiefly depressed about the director, Lindsay Anderson. All through his previous films, *This Sporting Life*, *If . . . , O Lucky Man!*, one could see a contest between extraordinary directing talent and an increasing arrogant slovenliness about the script. *In Celebration* is, in a way, his best film because it was protected from his "creative" touches—it was made from a play. The other three were works that, with a screenwriting aide, he devised; and the longer his career went on, the more obstacles Anderson's writing self put in the way of Director Anderson. In *Britannia Hospital* the wrestling match is over: the flatulent and foolish writer has pinned the director to the mat, helpless. The material looks even worse than it would have seemed if the director had been able, as in the past, to struggle a bit against it for its own sake.

The direction is so artily banal that it seems geriatric, remembrance of zings past. Let's concentrate on the script. Begin with the title. Is it, er, just possible that it's a figure for ailing Britain today? This hospital is being struck by workers and is being picketed by protesters who are angry at a fascist dictator's presence there and by the fact that the rich patients get better quarters and service.

### FILMS WORTH SEEING

*Betrayal.* Harold Pinter's dialogue is finer than the script as a whole. His scintillating cast and director make the most of that dialogue.

*Local Hero.* Pleasant confection about a young U.S. oil executive in an old Scottish fishing village. Intelligent amusement.

*Monty Python's The Meaning of Life.* Funny but, even more, angry. A superbly ingenious, ruthlessly clever collection of slashes at human imperfections by six of the wittiest men alive.

*Tender Mercies.* Robert Duvall, quietly gripping as a Texas singing star who dives down to alcoholic bottom and comes part way back. Horton Foote's script, Bruce Beresford's direction, and a perfect cast make it all a tight-lipped spiritual allegory.

**SK**



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Could this have some relevance to British political behavior and class structure? *Think* about it.

While thinking, consider the echoes of other people's work. The title recalls the (much better) title of Peter Nichols's hospital play, *The National Health*. The hospital-for-country metaphor has an antecedent in the music-hall metaphor of John Osborne's *The Entertainer*. The casting of a man in a gracious lady's role will remind many of Monty Python. The use of a midget in a pompous-official role is right out of Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite*, a source that Anderson has used before. The madly brilliant doctor, rendered inhuman by his zeal for experiment, who uses frozen bits of bodies for re-assembly, is a reminder of Michael Crichton's abomination, *Coma*. Earlier Anderson films have been marked by borrowing, but here the borrowings seem greater. It isn't plagiarism they suggest as much as divine right, self-bestowed. What's more, Anderson seems to think that, not only has he the right to expropriate but that his expropriation makes the borrowed material fresh.

The crux of the story is the visit of the Queen to this troubled hospital for a ceremonial occasion. This event is supposed to draw to a head all the preceding satire, but as that satire is weary or silly or derivative, the visit caps nothing—with nothing. Example of early failure in the film: a dying man, fighting for breath, is brought into the hospital, and the striking attendants reluctantly permit him entry only after they have been promised sausage with their tea. Anderson and his screenwriter David Sherwin don't perceive that the juxtaposition of the realistically dying man with the broadly cartooned attendants leaves the scene a tonal jumble.

Example of continuing failure: All through the film, the story of the experimenting doctor, (a leftover from *O Lucky Man!*), performed much as Moe of The Three Stooges might have done a mad scientist, is interwoven with the social-political gibes of the rest of the film. These two main elements simply don't play off each other, even though both are intended as instances of inhumanity. (Scientific callousness can persist under any system, monarchic or Marxist.) And the doctor's story ends with his presentation to an audience of workers who have stormed the building: he shows them the giant bodyless brain he has created. (This brain has absolutely nothing to do with the experiments we have seen him doing before this.) The display ends with the brain reciting tonelessly from *Hamlet*, "What a piece of work is a man" and getting stuck on the phrase "How like a god," which it repeats and repeats. What pungency.

To see *Britannia Hospital* just after seeing *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* is to see more than a wide gap in satirical insight and wit—there's also a difference in genesis. The Monty Python film leans on no accepted righteousness; its wide-ranging anger creates its own ethics. Anderson is just a tired old formulaic progressive telling us yet again, in tired terms, about the inequities of wealth and class, about the dangers of science.

The pity about Anderson, as I've noted before, is that he wasn't born into a film world where he could have worked in a studio under a producer boss who handed him scripts and ordered him to do them. In such a situation, even revising the scripts a little as he went, Anderson might have become one of the best of film *makers*. As is, taking upon himself creative tasks to which he can bring only conceited sterility and desperate borrowings, his film career fades fast.

A preview of 'Britain Salutes New York.'

# THE ENGLISHNESS OF ENGLISH ART

## BY RONALD PAULSON

IN NEW YORK Constable's landscapes are going to be shown at the Metropolitan Museum in the festival called "Britain Salutes New York" (opening April 14). In London the forger of Constable, Tom Keating, has become a TV personality offering instruction in how to paint a Constable (or a Turner or a Samuel Palmer). Keating has come to represent the Bohemian artist who turns the tables on the pinstriped dealers of Bond Street; he even published a catalog raisonné of his forgeries. He presents a parody of the English "painter" who disdains the dealers' values but also confirms them. He is as English as the stinging nettle: if it touches you it leaves a painful blister; but there is always growing nearby another plant called burdock, a leaf of which rubbed on the spot immediately relieves the itch.

The most remarkable event on the London art scene this winter was the savaging by the press of the Tate Gallery's exhibition of Richard Wilson, the father of English landscape painting. Wilson's was the latest in the exhibitions of the great English School artists that began in 1971 with Hogarth (going on to Turner, Constable, and Gainsborough), all of which met with pious enthusiasm from public and press. The object of the attack, of an intensity usually reserved for politicians, was a young Canadian art historian, David Solkin ("the wretched Solkin," as one reviewer called him), who had the temerity to break the pattern of bland connoisseurs' catalogs with a tendentious essay made more suspect by the indubitably Marxist tinge of its argument. He had the bad manners to argue that Wilson represented or at least reflected literary and social dimensions in his landscapes. The reviewers were outraged at the notion that an English landscapist could think, or that his landscapes could express conservative ideology or embody the concept of *concordia discors* or allude to Roman values of order. The limits of response of a British landscape are: "That is Twickenham!" or "How beautiful!" or, in the Keating mode, "Here he has borrowed from Claude—there from Gaspar Dughet—there from Hubert Robert!"

A little thought is acceptable (though regrettable) in a Hogarth "modern moral subject," but for a painter of England's beloved countryside, it is suffi-

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cient to be a "forger" who "paints in the manner of" Claude or Gaspar. Wilson (whose exhibition will be at the Yale Center for British Art as its contribution to the "Britain Salutes" festivities, April 20-June 19) was followed in March at the Tate by two subject painters of the English School exhibited back to back, one of the eighteenth century and the other contemporary: James Barry and Peter Blake. Barry painted in the manner of Michelangelo and Blake in the manner of advertising art and photography. Like Wilson, they did so to evoke the associations of a style. One ticket gets you into both shows, but the Barry galleries are deserted (as were the Wilson) while the Blake are crowded, though largely with fifteen- to twenty-five-year-olds.

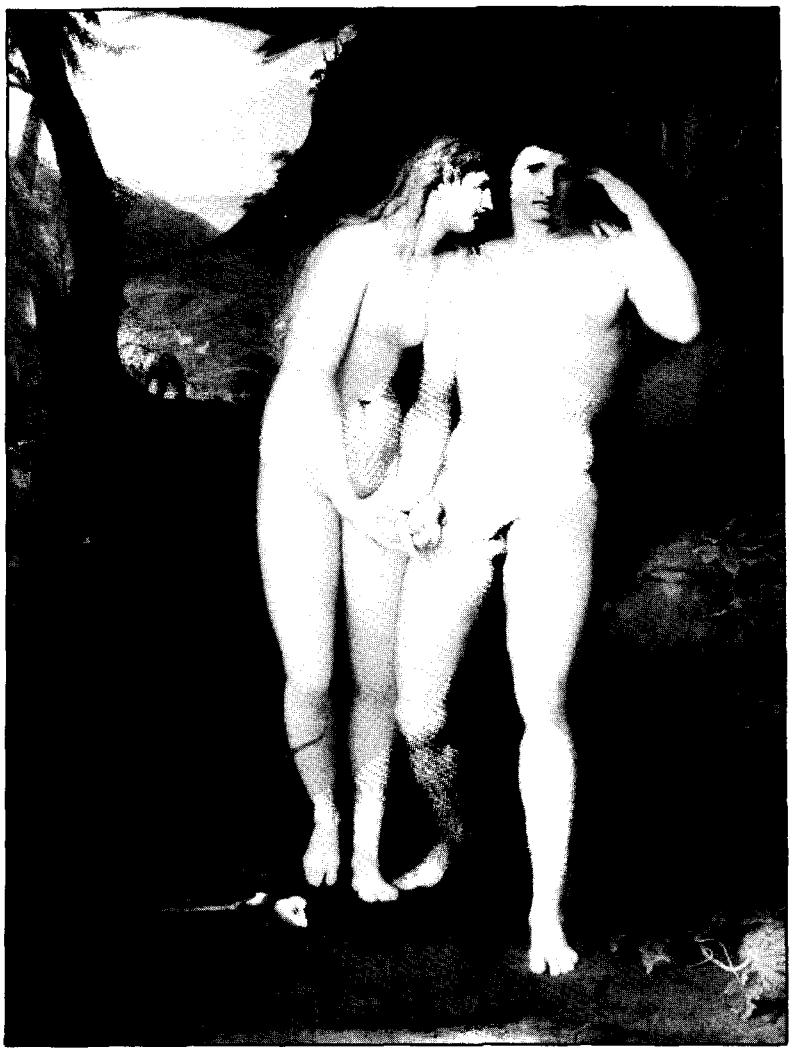
Barry offended his contemporaries, and continues to offend, because like Solkin he ranted about the significance of his art and produced images inflated with Burkean "sublimity" and with meaning both political and personal (attacks on the government, praise of Pitt the Elder, and defenses of himself). Barry was an Anglo-Irish Don Quixote who not only read Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* and Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into . . . the Sublime and Beautiful* but acted upon their doctrines. By actually attempting the most elevated style and most intellectual treatment, he forced his contemporaries to recognize the discrepancy between their professed admiration for "history painting" and their actual patronage of portraits of themselves and their country estates. He also unintentionally demonstrated the discrepancy between the principles of Reynolds's *Discourses* and the empiricism of English painting, in practice down to earth, local, witty, literary, and political. The "modern moral subjects" of Hogarth, the horses of Stubbs, the more informal portraits of Reynolds, and the candle-lit interiors of Wright of Derby were the actual triumphs of "history painting" in England.

In order to understand what I was seeing in the Barry exhibition, I found myself recalling the words of his hostile critics. Of Barry's *King Lear and Cordelia*, a critic calling himself "Guido" wrote

> Cordelia [is] represented by a Fat Billingsgate Fish-woman overpowered with Gin, and Lear personated by an old Cloaths-man, a Jew Rabbi picking her pocket.

One searches in vain for a better formulation to explain the bizarre effect of Barry's figures—"rather too brawny and indelicate for modern taste," a sympathetic reviewer warned of *Jupiter and Juno*—words that also apply to *Adam and Eve*.

Barry's problem was his borrowed style, for which he reached up to evoke the pinnacle of Western art, the antique Greek and its Renaissance equivalent, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel paintings, especially the thick-torsoed Christ of *The Last Judgment*. But set against Michelangelo's figures, Barry's are caricatures that elicit the words of "Guido." Barry's younger contemporary, William Blake, understood his problem and realized that he was not a Michelangelo—nor could he be in the England of the Foxes and younger Pitt—but rather a visionary caricaturist in the local English tradition of Hogarth and Gillray. Not imitation or evocation, which was sentimental (in the mode of Reynolds's evocation of Raphael and Gainsborough's of Murillo), but parody was the English mode. Barry confused the two, often suggesting by the tears and perspiration on the faces of his figures that the sublime and the ridiculous were one. William Blake sensibly reduced Barry's scale to a modest few inches and made Michelangelo and Raphael parodic referents in an irreverent retelling of the Old Testament story in which God the Father *did* become something like "an old Cloaths-man, a Jew Rabbi" hawking his Ten Commandments.



JAMES BARRY, 'THE TEMPTATION OF ADAM,
COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND, DUBLIN

Where Barry succeeds best is in portraiture. His histories are most viable when he selects details from the monster canvases: not only the faces and upper bodies in *Ulysses and a Companion fleeing from the Cave of Polyphemus* (his most famous painting, in which Burke is Ulysses and Barry one of his followers escaping from the art-establishment Cyclops) but the close-up versions of *Lear and Cordelia* and *Jupiter and Juno*—and also the portraits, in particular his self-portraits, where he focuses on expression, often turning the back and shoulders to block out all but the face, which seems to be peering back as at a pursuing Cyclops. (Barry was also a difficult person, paranoid in the way many English artists



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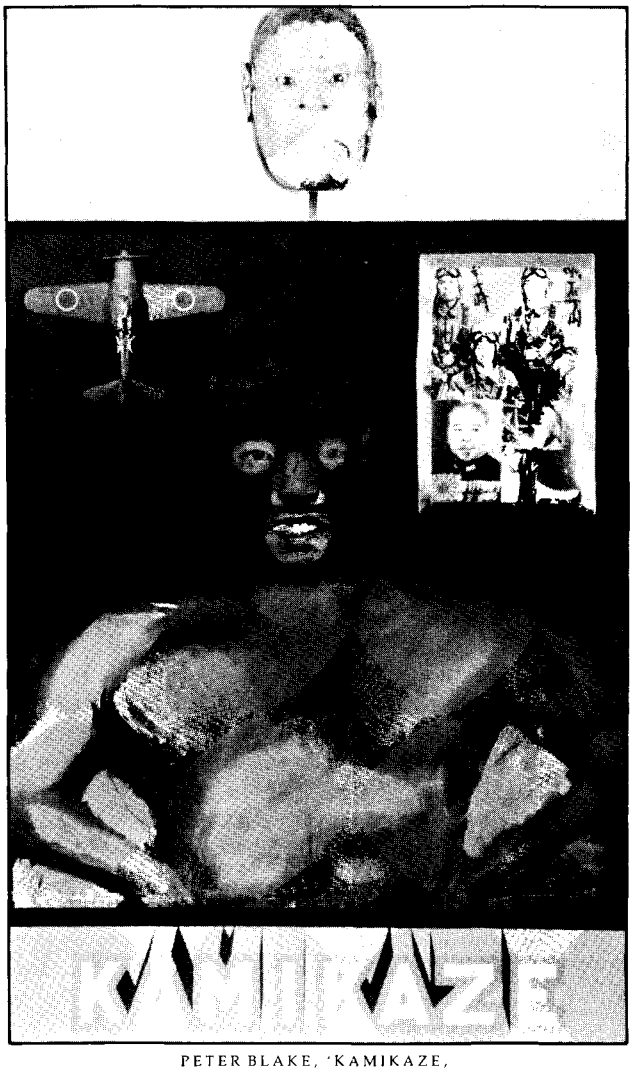
have been: e.g., Hogarth, Wilson, Turner, and Constable.) His friend and patron Burke advised him to beware relying on sketches; like Henry Fuseli, but more disastrously because he painted on such an immoderate scale, Barry could not make the transition from the strong compositional sketch to the full-scale, finished painting. But in the close-up "portraits" he retains the strength of the sketches—the combination of extremely emphatic form and a claustrophobic closeness of figure to figure and figure to viewer.

If Barry alienates, Peter Blake, like Keating, is enough a man of his time and place to please both critics and viewers. A fifty-year-old Englishman who is probably best known to Americans for his sleeve design of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, he reaches down to the flea market stalls and the dust bins for his forgeries. His return at the Tate is like that of Christine Keeler, who at forty has just written her second autobiography; the young look at his pictures to remember the Beatles, and the older go to see what has happened to him since 1970. But Peter Blake is nevertheless a typical English painter.

Both Blakes (Peter and William) employ the same small scale, the same nostalgia for a past, Gothic or Victorian Gothic, the same decorative surrounds, and the same jerry-built, do-it-yourself systems. (Peter's symbol, which appears in the background of several of his pictures, is Los Angeles' Watts Tower.) Whereas William wrote his own poems enclosed in Gothic surrounds to resemble a page from a medieval illuminated manuscript, Peter paints an image, often a face, in a frame made of badges, kewpie dolls, toys, and pin-up photos to resemble something between an icon and a homely lower-middle-class shrine. The painting itself is quite beautiful and accomplished.

Peter is English in that, like Hogarth or Dickens or Shakespeare, he wants to create not beautiful paintings but whole life histories for these shrine characters. He calls a Japanese wrestler Kamikaze and frames the face with a toy "Zero," clippings of World War II pilots, and a traditional Japanese warrior's mask. Another wrestler is labelled "Doktor K. Tortur," a stripper is "Roxy," and a circus performer is "Siriol, She-Devil of Naked Madness"; and the objects around them, as in a Hogarth engraving or a painting by Augustus Egg or Holman Hunt (and not as in a surrealist Cornell Box), supply a life history.




PETER BLAKE, 'KAMIKAZE,
COURTESY OF THE TATE GALLERY, LONDON

But remove these and the image itself is only delicate, nostalgic, popular, and photographic. For the photograph is Blake's forgery, as Michelangelo's paintings were Barry's and Constable's Tom Keating's. He imitates not a human face or another painter's painting of a face but a photograph of a face (the conventions of which, however, were established years ago in the late paintings of Walter Sickert). He takes his principles of composition from composite photographs, collages, and the roto-gravure layouts of newspapers.

Blake does not exhibit in the United States because of the treatment by American critics who, he says, regard him as "a fifth-rate English Pop-artist copying the work of the American Pop artists." How different he is can be seen in his early paintings (1950s) of three-dimensional children shown reading a two-dimensional comic strip upright as if pasted to the picture plane (not the canvas surface): a trompe l'oeil whimsy that has not interested Americans. He never uses old stuffed goats or paint-smeared bedding or flags or cigar boxes for themselves—or for their ability to free him to paint—but always puts them into, or surrounds them with, stories and figures painted in the convention of illustrated children's books. In a fairly recent picture, he paints a photographic image of a Daimler in a landscape of fairies. It could suggest that a Daimler has been parked in an encampment of fairies, or that the fairies have been caught in a photograph of a Daimler, or (since it hangs in the show next to a sleeve design for Gershwin's *An American in Paris*) that Blake has simply painted an advertisement for Daimlers.

When he began to omit the surround of his images in the late 1960s he had left only a slightly parodic echo of a popular image, whose sentimentality was obtrusive unless underlined or qualified by the patently sentimental (a synonym for commercial) images on the frame. The surround also settled the problem of when a picture was finished, for when you know the image is supposed to simulate a girlie photograph or a cinema poster, and you have real photographs and other objects on the surround to prove it, you know when you have finished. With nothing but the canvas itself (as in a number of large pictures Blake began in the 1960s and has never finished), you are left with the question of whether the painting should look like a Hockney, a Michael Andrews, a Larry Rivers, or whatever; and it never gets finished—or completed. In short, Blake would not be himself



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if he did not depend on extragraphic resources like words, emblems, and associations of ideas. And perhaps we should not be put off by the pleasure the English feel—though often repress—in these constructs merely because our assumptions about art remain so largely French.

When he began to omit the collage surround of his images, Blake replaced them with elaborate Victorian frames. He moved to the country, founded a Brotherhood of Ruralists, and replaced his Christine Keeler strippers with Twiggy-like fairies out of Carroll's *Alice* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by way of the paintings of Maxfield Parrish. Titania or Ophelia he imagines as if "She's out there now," picking up whatever is lying around the countryside, perhaps used spark plugs or old buttons for a necklace. Titania is a thin meager-beautiful adolescent with a spaced-out face and wildly blowing hair and a twist of grass around each nipple and daisies braided into her pubic hair. The face is haunting for the same reason that the accidentally caught expression in a photograph by Diane Arbus is haunting. *A Mad Tea Party at Watts Tower* (c. 1968), with the total self-engrossment of its three figures, whose faces have the frozen sadness of old photographs, is eerily impressive until we remember that we have seen similar faces and settings in Maxfield Parrish's mural for the King Cole Room of the Knickerbocker Hotel. (In the background at the Tate, we heard the music of Edward Elgar and the Beatles.)

BLAKE KNOWS better than the critics of David Solkin what English art at its most English has always been about. English art is never satisfied with the thing itself (as Dutch art has been) or the forms themselves (as French art) or the expression of the object or of the subject (German art): it has always pointed outward to someone else's art in a self-deprecating way, downward to the quotidian, the ordinary life of the Englishman, and upward to some unobtainable and probably inappropriate ideal. For one thing, it has never trusted itself. (Barry and Blake have slipped in and out of the Tate like thieves in the night—or poor relations—with exhibitions opening and closing within hardly more than a month. The portraits of the Flemish transplant Sir Anthony van Dyck, who spent his last few years in England fabricating the image of its aristocracy, have been on show at the National Portrait Gallery all winter. Though hung in quarters that resemble a rabbit warren, they continue to attract the English public.) There is a complexity at the same time as a diffidence in English art as in no other, probably deriving from the relative strength of the native literary tradition over the graphic.

English landscape painting is immediately distinguishable by its love of a particular English place, its nostalgia for the English past, and its need to evoke literary associations. The largest group of British paintings to be seen in London at the moment is in the exhibit "Landscape in Britain 1850-1950" at the Hayward Gallery. There is of course much variety, including modern evocations of Constable, Turner, Gainsborough, and Palmer (as well as of Cézanne and others). But two paintings will sum up. One is a wonderfully moody stretch of oceanfront at a seaside resort (1889, by Norman Garstin), rain falling and a few scattered people with umbrellas; the title should be simply the name of the place so vividly depicted, but it is the poetic jingle, "The Rain It Raineth Every Day." The other landscape is Carel Weight's long, bleak panorama of a South London street (1955)—one I would immediately recognize if I passed it—which has in the foreground, half cut off, a small child (a diminutive version of Munch's *Scream*) with its hand held out, presumably about to be hit by a car. The quiet landscape is forever altered by that event (*The Moment* is the title). A friend of mine who studied with Weight at the Royal College of Art said it was his habit to look at a landscape the student had painted and say: "My boy, always put in a fairy somewhere." Even Constable by the end of his career was adding emblematic rabbits and statues of Raphael and Michelangelo where there were none. It is the British habit; they insist in putting a fairy in almost every landscape.

* * *

"Britain Salutes New York," celebrating the bicentennial of the Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution, will include exhibitions of Constable at the Metropolitan Museum, starting April 14; Holbein drawings from Windsor Castle at Pierpont Morgan Library, starting April 21; Royal Academy paintings (Gainsborough, Reynolds, Turner, etc.) at the National Academy of Design, starting April 29; and Henry Moore sculptures at the Metropolitan Museum, starting May 14.


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# DECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA

## BY ROBERT ALTER

NOW IS CLEARLY the hour of Deconstruction in American literary studies. Deconstructionist articles, which began during the mid-1970s in coterie journals like *Diacritics*, *Glyph*, and *Boundary* to argue for a radical revision of our notions of text, reading, and literary canon, have long since moved into the central periodicals of the academic profession like the *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, and even a journal of biblical studies, *Semeia*, recently devoted a special number to Derrida and the Bible. In the past nine months, no less than four book-length introductions to Deconstruction have appeared in English. But perhaps the surest sign that Deconstruction has arrived with a vengeance is that one now very frequently hears literary scholars, young and old, using the verb "to deconstruct"—forbidding to the uninitiated, exhilarating to the practitioner—when all that is meant is to revise, to qualify, to refute, to reformulate, or, quite simply, to criticize.

For want of a better term, I shall be referring to Deconstruction as a school of criticism, though, strictly speaking, it is both less and more than that, as I shall try to explain. Unlike any other trend that has been centrally influential in American criticism, Deconstruction derives directly from the work of a single person, Jacques Derrida, who of late has been dividing his time between Paris and Yale, which has become the undisputed American center of the movement. Derrida's field is philosophy and not literature, though the example of his writing has encouraged a programmatic insistence on the part of his followers that there can be no substantive distinction between the two realms. Beginning with two major volumes published in French in 1967, Derrida has conducted a sustained epistemological critique of the assumptions of Western thought. I shall briefly indicate the direction in which his analysis moves before proceeding to some reflections on what such analysis may mean to American literary scholars, but for an adequate account of the intricacies of Derrida's method, readers ought to consult the lucid and informed introductions by Jonathan Culler and Christopher Norris (the latter being the more concise and also by far the more engaging of the two).

Derrida's point of departure is a linguistic issue stressed long ago by Ferdinand de Saussure: that the relation between word and referent, signifier and signified, is inevitably an arbitrary and conventional one. From this primordial disjuncture, Derrida causes a whole world of chasms to open up. The presence of objects, persons, and experience that literature repeatedly pretends to offer us turns out to be, on careful scrutiny, ineluctable absence; what appears to be literal is necessarily metaphorical; what is proffered as reality is in fact fiction; all literary manifestations of voice and assertions of its primacy merely mask the awareness that writing, as a mediated and "absent" means of communication, always underlies the illusion of voice. Western thought, it is assumed, is based on a series of inter-related hierarchical oppositions, such as origin and derivation, speech and writing, inside and outside, central and marginal, literal and figurative; and the basic operation of deconstructing a text is to show by close reading that these oppositions are unstable or in fact reversible, the tell-tale traces of their reversibility having been "inscribed" in the text unwittingly by the writer, who could not really avoid such inscription because of the epistemological duplicity of the medium of language in which he worked. Derrida first demonstrated this method and these conclusions on texts by Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche; and American critics, with frequent recurrence to Nietzsche as the major precursor of Deconstruction, have gone on to apply this procedure to Shelley, Keats, Melville, George Eliot, Freud, Marx, and many other literary and philosophic texts—but, instructively, only very rarely to any writers earlier than Rousseau.

A brief illustration may be helpful. Freud is particularly valued—or more properly, revalued— by Derrida and his followers because psychoanalytic theory is now understood to be a reversal of certain fundamental hierarchical oppositions in forming the Western imagination, such as conscious and unconscious, normal and abnormal, and even (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) life and death. That is, in each of these instances, the faculty, phenomenom or drive conventionally thought to be primary is shown through Freud's analysis to be secondary and derivative at least in the deconstructive view. But then Freud, the magisterial forerunner of Deconstruction, is himself subjected to deconstructive readings. To cite one central instance, much of Freud's theory as well as his therapeutic praxis is founded on the idea of uncovering some ultimate origin of psychological dysfunction in the very early experience of the child. Derrida argues, however, that a

Robert Alter's critical books include *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (University of California Press), *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books), and *Motives for Fiction*, which will be published next year by Harvard University Press.

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close attention to Freud's own varying formulations and metaphors and the implicit logic of his argument reveals that the real originating event is always a will-o'-the-wisp: every primal scene, whether it comes up on the couch or in Freud's theorizing, is always a fiction, a representation of something that never may have happened and that, in any case, never can be immediately grasped. "The unconscious text," Derrida writes, "is . . . a text no where present, consisting of archives which are always already transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with reproduction." Freud, like Nietzsche, is credited with having virtually anticipated the deconstructive reading of his own writings; other texts may be more aggressively exposed as pretending to realizations of immediacy they could not possibly make. In any event, the effect of this procedure is to rotate Freud 180 degrees on his own axis. A system based on the crucially determinative power of origins, on the strong impact on the psyche of infantile neurotic mystery, is redefined as an infinite regress of derivations or representations of representations.

Deconstruction, let me suggest, has had two positive effects on critical discourse in America, but each of these potential advantages runs the grave risk of being overwhelmed by an evident disadvantage inextricably attached to it. Anglo-American criticism has been notoriously commonsensical, empirical, unwilling to examine the conceptual underpinnings of its own enterprise, and Deconstruction has brought with it a new openness to Continental habits of philosophical reflection and methodological self-scrutiny. The reverse side of this ambiguous coin, and the one that frequently turns up, is that a great many younger scholars these days engage in page after page of philosophic speculation of the most glib and amateurish sort, while the literary text itself, far from being in any way opened up by the analyst, is no more than the occasion for metaphysical ruminations that sound suspiciously similar, whether the writer under discussion is Rilke or Wordsworth or Baudelaire.

The second, perhaps somewhat less ambiguous advantage of Deconstruction is that it has encouraged a healthy skepticism toward previously unexamined assumptions that the meanings of literary works are somehow ultimately unitary, all seeming tensions resolvable in a grand synthesis of poetic signification. One recent demonstration of the usefulness of the counterview that literary meanings can be multiple, unstable, unresolved, is J. Hillis Miller's reading of seven English novels, *Fiction and Repetition*. (Miller is one of the four resident senior members of the so-called Yale School, the other three being Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom.) Interestingly, Miller, who in his periodical essays of the last few years has been a doctrinaire polemicist on behalf of the movement, here shows himself, despite his own protestations to the contrary, to be an undeconstructed New Critic, meticulously tracing out patterns of imagery and motif in the novels he discusses, only being careful to note that the texts exhibit certain essential tensions or contradictions not referrable to an overarching artistic unity. But the flip side of this advantage of critical tentativeness in Deconstruction is a conspicuous tendency among younger American critics in particular to derive the same formulaic paradoxes from every text they turn to, which makes one suspect that the Deconstructionist breakthrough may not really lead anywhere for criticism, may in fact prove to be a dead end. Christopher Norris comments tartly on "a certain routine ingenuity," an "effort to seek out self-supporting puzzles and paradoxes" among American Deconstructionists, and with articles by Jonathan Culler and Cynthia Chase particularly in mind, he complains of a tedious tendency to extract from all texts " 'double readings,' intended to show how novels display their own artifice even when exploiting the realist mode."

### Books Discussed In This Essay

*The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* edited by Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, Wallace Martin (University of Minnesota Press, 263 pp., $29.50, $12.95 paper)

*On Deconstruction* by Jonathan Culler (Cornell University Press, 320 pp., $22.50)

*Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* by Paul de Man (University of Minnesota Press, 288 pp., $29.50, $12.95 paper)

*Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* by Vincent B. Leitch (Columbia University Press, 290 pp., $25, $8.95 paper)

*Fiction and Repetition* by J. Hillis Miller (Harvard University Press, 250 pp., $15)

*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* by Christopher Norris (Metheun, 157 pp., $13.95, $7.95 paper).

*Marxism and Deconstruction* by Michael Ryan (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 272 pp., $18.50)

WHAT IS THE APPEAL of this doctrine or method or theory—it is sometimes one or another or all of these—for American literary scholars? Obviously, there cannot be one simple answer for all who have been attracted to Deconstruction, but some attention to the language these various critics use may suggest certain possibilities of explanation. To begin with, because of the energy of the movement's radical critique, its adherents very readily think of it as the one true avant-garde of contemporary intellectual life. Jonathan Culler speaks of "progressive" criticism in contradistinction to all other kinds; Christopher Norris objects to a "rearguard defense of New Criticism"; Paul de Man (in *Allegories of Reading*, 1979) refers to "the more advanced investigations of literature," currently being undertaken "against considerable resistance." Again and again, Deconstruction is described by its practitioners as a "strategy," and the martial implications of that term are scarcely left in doubt when Culler talks of the need "to continue the struggle on both fronts at once," or when Barbara Johnson, an acolyte of the Yale School, transfers the battle imagery to the text itself and describes Deconstruction as "the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text."

The military metaphors are strongly reinforced by the central image of Deconstructionist discourse, which originates with Derrida himself but has been eagerly adopted by his English-language followers, and that is the image of the lever. Occasionally, this sounds very much like a figuration of phallic intrusion into the sancta of Western thought, as when Christopher



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Norris writes, "it is here that Derrida inserts his lever of *differance*," but in all cases, one clearly detects the basic image of achieving surprising power by a deft maneuver and with that power "overthrowing," "collapsing" structures deemed solid and imposing by authoritative tradition. "The effect of deconstructive analyses," declares Culler, a happy wielder of the lever, "is knowledge [actually, knowledge that we can know nothing] and mastery." Geoffrey Hartman, in a recent lecture on Keats, recasts this underlying image more delicately when he says that the purpose of Deconstruction is "to disturb a poem along its own fault lines." Why a poem should have fault lines may be apparent from my preliminary remarks on Derrida, but it is a point to which I should like to return.

DOES ALL THIS language of overthrowing and military assault reflect some deep affinity between Deconstruction and political revolutionism? Only, I would suggest, as a matter of sensibility. Derrida has made it clear in interviews that he stands on the left politically, but in French intellectual circles that is like declaring for motherhood, while it is hard to see how Deconstructive analysis, conceptually removed as it is from historical process, can address itself to concrete political realities—or how, indeed, it does not invite a certain mandarin intellectual activity divorced from the political realm.

To be sure, one can find belated New Left advocates of participatory democracy like Michael Ryan, author of *Marxism and Deconstruction*, who have persuaded themselves that Derrida is grist for their revolutionary mill. "The deconstructive criticism of absolutist concepts in the theory of meaning," he writes, his Marxist prose clanking loudly as he pushes notions of unitary meaning all the way into political absolutism, "can be said to have a political-institutional corollary, which is the continuous revolutionary displacement of power toward radical egalitarianism and the plural defusion of all forms of macro- and microdomination." For Jonathan Culler, who in fact was an S.D.S. activist in the late '60s, the last true revolution is feminism, and he thinks he has discovered a warrant for this in Deconstruction, being encouraged by Derrida's example to reverse what seems to him the most nefarious of hierarchical oppositions—between


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man and woman. Many aspects of traditional criticism, he claims, such as the notion of the author and the impulse to discriminate legitimate from illegitimate interpretations, reflect a general promotion of paternal values. "Phallagocentrism unites an interest in patriarchal authority, unity of meaning, and certainty of origin." It may be a bit tactless for a critic so pleased with the "mastery" achieved through the insertion of the Deconstructive "lever" to accuse traditional critical consciousness of centering on the phallus, but what is more serious is that Culler's claim, like Ryan's, reveals a fundamental flaw in the effort to harness Deconstruction to a political program. Under the guise of conceptually subtle analysis, what such writers do is to give free rein to the loosest kind of metaphorical associations, blurring intrinsic distinctions between textual mechanisms and social institutions, and, in Culler's case, equating two different acceptations of the same term, so that "legitimacy" of interpretation can be directly bracketed with social-biological legitimacy (is it really a reflection of paternal values, for example, to label illegitimate a reading of *Othello* as a play about Venice's declining mercantile empire?).

THE FACT is that Derrida's relentless—and at times, unsettlingly playful—epistemological skepticism leaves no real purchase for an ideological position. It is in perfect consonance with the logic of the method that the writers of the Yale School should be quite apolitical, a condition that leads Michael Ryan to speak contemptuously of their "conservatism" and make Jonathan Arac, in his afterword to *The Yale Critics*, raise a certain doubt about the "timidity" of their political stance. The real impetus of Deconstruction in America is a rebellion against authority in the strictly delimited sense of academic institution and critical tradition, as Culler makes clear when he writes,

> Since deconstruction is interested in what has been excluded and in the perspective it affords on the consensus, there can be no question of accepting consensus as truth or restricting truth to what is demonstrable within a system.

In one aspect, the operation of deconstructing a text is a form of intellectual judo, the critic overturning the text by seizing the momentum of its own unguarded semantic thrusts, in Hartman's image, its fault lines. This operation imparts, as I have intimated, a sense of newly discovered power over the once imposing text and, even more, over the body of interpretation that critical discussion has built up around the text.

DECONSTRUCTION in this country has been especially attractive to young, intellectually ambitious literary scholars, and the animus against professional authority may explain something of the ambivalence toward the Yale Critics that they have variously expressed. Thus, the volume of essays edited by Arac, Godzich, and Martin, which is entirely the work of younger critics, registers—often, I'm afraid, in rather muddy expositions—great admiration for the Yale Critics as trailblazers and repeated dissatisfaction with their alleged inconsistencies and backslidings, their failure to pursue the consequences of the true doctrine. (Symptomatically, there is also an undercurrent of complaint about the lack of academic jobs in America.) Only Derrida, as the conveniently removed father of the movement, is exempt from such criticism, and to a lesser degree, Paul de Man, the most austere and philosophically intent of the Yale group.

Another symptom of the movement's problematic concern with authority is its oddly anachronistic preoccupation with the New Criticism. The New Critics, after all, had ceased to be a dominant force in literary studies by the beginning of the 1960s, but the American Deconstructionists, who began to emerge over a decade later, insistently revert to the New Critics as the archenemy of authentic critical discourse. The reason for this is in part a matter of autobiography. A generation ago, Yale was the major academic stronghold of the New Criticism. Hartman and Bloom were both trained there; Miller began his career as a New Critic; and de Man arrived in this country from Belgium at the very apogee of New Critical influence. Although I would not consider Bloom a Deconstructionist, because he vehemently rejects Derrida's notion of pan-textuality (*"Il n'y a pas de hors-texte."*) and insists instead on the primacy of personality before writing in the creation of literature, he picks up a covert Deconstructionist theme in his constant stress on the Oedipal imperative of sons to overturn fathers that makes the continuity of literary tradition an illusion masking repeated rebellion and willful misreading.

There is also, however, an important substantive as well as personal opposition between the Deconstructionists and the New Critics. The New Critics characteristically thought of the literary artifact—usually imagined as a work or object rather than a "text"—as a uniquely privileged crystallization of language in which a high density of complex meanings was brought together in a unity not available to other uses of languge. In *Blindness and Insight* (1971), Paul de Man deconstructs these claims by arguing that the New Criticism's key values of irony and ambiguity undermine its cherished conception of the poem as an organic unity, opening up a discontinuous world of plural "significations that can be radically opposed to each other."

BASICALLY, the difference between New Critics and Deconstructionists is one between an idolatry of the text—a charge in fact often leveled against the New Critics back in the 1940s—and an iconoclasm directed against both the text and its critical accretions. Now, in our modern, more or less post-Christian intellectual culture, idolatry is a bad thing, iconoclasm a good thing, but the history of religions in which those terms originate should give us some pause about this facile contrast. An idolator is someone who worships an illusion, but the illusion may have aspects of powerful if partial truth, and the worship can engender the perception and creation of great beauty. An iconoclast is, of course, an image-smasher, and the Middle East abounds in the remains of exquisite mosaic floors defaced by the gouging instruments of Muslim iconoclasts who wanted to expunge every semblance of a represented human form. In regard to the literary text, this opposition between idolatry and iconoclasm can be seen by juxtaposing Cleanth Brooks's Donnian image of the poem as a well-wrought urn with the notion of the poem as a seismically unstable pattern of fault lines. The Deconstructionists rightly remind us that we cannot escape from thinking metaphorically, and of course every metaphor has its own bias of distortion. I shall not, then, try to decide between the "truth" of these two images, but a word on their practical consequences for criticism may be in order. The New Critical view could lead to naively ingenious overreading, but it also encouraged the cultivation of a fine atten-



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tiveness to the manifold details and interconnections of a poem and thus to a lively appreciation of the fullness of poetic utterance. One very occasionally sees this happening in critical analyses inspired by Deconstruction, but the far more prevalent tendency is to look with iconoclastic severity at the fault lines to the exclusion of a perception of the poetic construct, and from there to proceed to de rigueur epistemological lucubrations on slippery signifiers and receding referents.

The work of Paul de Man may provide a useful summarizing focus for this complicated and far from uniform enterprise of contemporary criticism because it demonstrates both the real intellectual power of the method and the limits to which its assumptions confine it. Almost all of de Man's writing is included in his two volumes of essays, the earlier one, *Blindness and Insight*, just now happily reissued with the addition of five previously uncollected pieces. Like everybody associated with the Yale School, de Man essentially begins his account of the problematic of literature with the later eighteenth century, the writers to whom he recurs being Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, Proust (the essays of *Allegories of Reading* focus exclusively on these four, while both Rousseau and Nietzsche figure centrally in *Blindness and Insight*, which is otherwise devoted to criticism of critics). The sundry Yale Critics, in other words, proceed from that point in time when the status of language, the continuity of literary tradition, the role of the writer, were all called into question, and when some poets were for the first time aspiring heretically not to represent the world but to remake it. It is at least possible that a different selection of texts, which would embrace the Renaissance, the Middle Ages, the classical and biblical worlds, might yield a different picture of what literary language does.

Earlier I cited a statement by de Man as an instance of the fondness for images of the vanguard among Deconstructionists, but his own preferred metaphors lie in a rather different direction. Repeatedly, he represents literary discourse as a mystification, a mask, and what these finally come down to, a lie. He has been accused of, or complimented for, writing gracelessly on purpose, and one sees the point of that observation, but I would also suggest that there is a kind of poetic grandeur at certain moments in de Man's prose, and it is, supremely, a poetry of renunciation. At the end of his essay on Rilke, he writes,

> The promise contained in Rilke's poetry, which the commentators, in the eagerness of their belief, have described in all its severe complexity, is thus placed, by Rilke himself, within the dissolving perspective of the lie.

A few pages earlier in the same essay, speaking of what Rilke does with figurative language, de Man introduces the metaphor behind all metaphors in his own writing—hollowness:

> The figure stripped of any seduction besides that of its rhetorical elasticity can form, together with other figures, constellations of figures that are inaccessible to meaning and to the senses, located far beyond any concern for life or for death in the hollow space of the unreal sky.

There is an impressive element of philosophic rigor in de Man, but such moments make one grant the justice of Stanley Corngold's comment (in *The Yale Critics*) that de Man is not free of "metaphysical pathos." The gap be-


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tween signifier and signified takes de Man very far indeed—into a bleak, haunted world where all depth is illusory surface, everything solid mere hollowness, reality an unattainable mirage, reading itself an impossibility because meaning intrinsically resists determination. A Calvinist sense of gloomy predestination is working here—instructively, de Man transforms a comment of Baudelaire's on a comic pratfall into an image of the Fall—which seems to have been reinforced at an early point in de Man's formation by the critical side of Sartrean existentialism with its notions of inauthenticity and bad faith. As a metaphysic, this seems powerfully felt by the writer but also somehow private, and hardly warranted by the linguistic facts it takes as its point of departure. As a framework for understanding even modern literature, it seems apt enough for poets of the crises of language like Rilke, Mallarmé, Celan, but it would, I think, present certain difficulties as an approach to Whitman, Yeats, Neruda, Mandelstam, even Baudelaire.

PERHAPS the ultimate problem of Deconstruction as a critical method is that when pursued with scrupulous intentness, as in de Man's work, it has to be by its own logic imperial, has to make more or less the same claims for all texts. A particularly revealing instance is a review-essay de Man wrote in 1974 on *The Anxiety of Influence*, the first in the series of exercises in Freudian-gnostic literary theory by his colleague Harold Bloom. De Man affirms the importance of Bloom's book, though he is distinctly unhappy with what he regards as the fiction of Oedipal rebellion against literary forebears that stands at its center:

> We can forget about the temporal scheme and about the pathos of the oedipal son; underneath, the book deals with the difficulty or, rather, the impossibility of reading and, by inference, with the indeterminacy of literary meaning. If we are willing to set aside the trappings of psychology, Bloom's essay has much to say on the encounter between latecomer and precursor as a displaced version of the paradigmatic encounter between reader and text.

But, of course, any reader of Bloom can attest that the psychology, far from being mere "trappings" with something else "underneath," is the heart of the matter, and that for him the life of literature is in the enactment of dramatic conflict between aspiring writer/reader and his authoritative precursors whom he must struggle to displace. It may well be that in the English-speaking world critics have too often taken for granted what reading is, what goes on in the encounter between reader and text, and the warnings of Deconstruction about the epistemologically treacherous grounds on which this encounter takes place have a salutary side. But to insist that literary and critical texts, when properly "teased," "disturbed," or "levered," must always reveal this underlying quandary is to turn the multitudinous voices of literature into a sad Johnny One-Note; and this, I fear, is what even the best of Deconstruction often threatens to do.

# ANGRY SON OF IRELAND

## Voices: A Life of Frank O'Connor by James Matthews

(Atheneum, 320 pp., $25)

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
> Perfection of the life or of the work,
> And if it take the second must refuse
> A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

The lines are by W. B. Yeats, who was the friend and patron of the youthful Frank O'Connor, and therefore stand with a particular appropriateness above a review of this biography. But in fact they came several times to mind in recent months, as I was reading the biographies of Robert Lowell and Delmore Schwartz and John Berryman and Katherine Anne Porter—insatiable, like other readers, for specifics of madness, alcohol, infidelity, waste, bitchiness, manic narcissism. It is because these four were among the finest writers of our time that the books had come into being, and the same reason seemed to justify my curiosity. Had they been rock stars or diet doctors or sanctimonious politicians, my curiosity might have been no less, but it would have lacked a particular justification. Art is a mystery, I assured myself, but perhaps a few of its secrets rest among the roots of these disordered lives.

But now there has come to me for review the biography of a friend. James Matthews brings considerable gifts to this *Life* of Michael O'Donovan, the Irish short-story writer who became famous as "Frank O'Connor." His criticism of O'Connor's fiction is properly directed toward the establishment of links between the life and the art, but it is unwaveringly sensitive and shrewd, never reductive. And for the work of a biographer who never met his subject, his portrait of O'Connor's vivid, almost theatrical public personality is astonishingly accurate. The heart of his enterprise, however, is a search for the man who moved and acted and felt beneath that self which was presented to the world.

Hovering above all such literary biographies in the modern mode is Lawrance Thompson's many-volumed life of Robert Frost. It was in 1939 that Frost chose the admiring and then-youthful Thompson as his biographer. Decades were to pass and Frost to die before the work was completed, and by then a sadder and wiser Thompson had discovered that the magnificent poet of hired men and snowy woods was also a monster of ruthless and mean-spirited calculation. The result was a massive curiosity—an authorized biography within the paragraphs of which an author struggles with the appalling human implications of his researches.

Matthews, I hasten to say, was not presented with a similar problem. Whatever the messes of O'Connor's life, it was never a life of calculation. Quite the contrary, he was a man of fierce loves and hates, impetuous and reckless, blundering through vigorous innocence into cat's-cradles of domestic and social entanglements. The crucial decade of his life, the 1940s, was given over, in part, to strange, Laocöon-like threshings within the coils of an entire society. And, in part, to the composition of short stories that are miracles of shapely craft, the narrative voice casual, colloquial, never striving for effect, but



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the design lovely, intricate, and poised. He was a compulsive, almost a possessed, rewriter, who thought nothing of devoting twenty drafts to a story. And like other obsessed writers, he was capable of laying waste the lives of those joined to him—wives, lovers, children, friends. Matthews has spoken at length with most of these. And, in particular, the first two of the women who bore O'Connor's children have been generous with their memories, if not always generous in their memory of O'Connor.

"Writing a life of Frank O'Connor," Matthews says, "is like circling a stranger's house, circling and peering into that house from the outside, circling to know something of who or what is inside, never able to enter but content with momentary glimpses from many angles." Well and honorably said. These are words that any biographer, of any man or woman, should take to heart, and without failing to note the nervous, disturbed, moral tremor within them. Matthews, I suspect, was drawn toward the composition of this biography by two joined impulses—an admiration of O'Connor's art and a liking of the immensely attractive personality that O'Connor, in his final years, presented to the world. What he discovered, in the course of his researches and interviews, was a flawed, passionate man, mercurial and vehement, with just enough of the genius in him to make him a delight and a trial.

When O'Connor and I became friends, in the last decade of his life, the public image, though recent, was firm. He had sailed home to Ireland from his exile, attended by a loving, witty, and resourceful American wife. In America he earned what also had been granted to him in Ireland but only with grudging and at times savage reservations—acknowledgment as a man who had written some of the finest stories ever written in English. "Only a major prophet," a Dublin journalist had written in 1951,

> could have achieved such reeking unpopularity in his own country. Few Irish writers have managed to maintain at sullen heat, and for so long, such personal antipathies against themselves: fewer still have extracted such sweet-savored bemusement from doing so.

The O'Connor whom I knew was, as they say, larger than life, a handsome man, at once charming and imperious, with a crest of white, thinning hair, a bristling moustache, piercing brown eyes behind thick glasses, and had the manner of a wary conquistador. He was a bit of a dandy, conscious of the effects of dress, and his jackets of Donegal tweed and Galway bonin were offset by a single exotic touch—a leather-thonged bolo tie, dark-hued, fiery Navajo turquoise. As if saying, "Damn your eyes, I am back home with foreign decorations." He had long since returned his medal as a veteran of the War of Independence to the appropriate Irish authority.

FRANK O'CONNOR BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

At one point I saw him almost daily, for a quiet and very moderate drink in the evening: the poet Patrick Kavanagh described him with disapproval as "a *bun* man, not a *pub* man." But although we became close friends, I never disturbed his fiercely guarded reticences. I was one of his new friends, the friends of his self-assured final years. But because many of the Irishmen whom Matthews has interviewed were also my friends, or acquaintances, I was aware of him as a man who in earlier years had attracted fierce loyalty and fierce dislike. And Dublin being Dublin, I was proffered gossip, malice, and oblique, knife-edged anecdote.

It had been an extraordinary life, linked with the life of modern Ireland in ways that created curious resonances. Michael O'Donovan was born in a Cork slum in 1903, the son of a drunken ex-soldier and a servant girl, and educated, after a fashion, by the Christian Brothers. Inspired by one remarkable teacher, Daniel Corkery, novelist, faltering poet, and ferocious, sectarian patriot, he joined the Irish Republican Army, chose the side of the irreconcilables during the Civil War, fought, was captured, and spent a year in prison. In prison, a brilliant autodidact, he read the Russians, studied German, translated Goethe. After prison, and for almost twenty years, he worked as a librarian. And he wrote stories and poems that caught the attention first of "AE" (pen name of George Russell) and then of Yeats. By the time of World War II, in 1939, his reputation as a writer was established; he was with Yeats a director of the Abbey Theatre, and he was shortly, with his Cork friend, Sean O'Faolain, to found the *Bell*, which was to be the most distinguished literary journal ever to appear in Ireland.

Then, all at once, everything came unstuck. As he explained it to me once, "I married a divorced woman, Yeats died, I resigned from the Abbey Theatre, and Hitler invaded Poland." It was clear that he had ranged these events in



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a descending order of importance. Within three years, he was, quite literally, an outcast, working in England, and by various open and covert pressures from government entirely banned from the radio and the newspapers of his own country. "Blast Ireland," he wrote to a friend. "I spent ten years trying to save this country from itself when I should have been trying to save myself from the country."

THIS WAS the crucial period of O'Connor's life. Despite Matthews's best efforts, what happened and why remains mysterious, save in outline. The rigid Irish puritanism of the period cannot be exaggerated, and O'Connor, never a prudent man, had affronted it by openly "living in sin." And was later to affront it again when he established a second liaison with an Englishwoman whom he brought to Dublin with him. He also had made public his detestation of the mediocrity of Irish life, first in a BBC broadcast and then in the English pages of Cyril Connolly's *Horizon*. Ireland, doggedly and precariously neutral in the war, moved against him with those massive, oblique, and genial instruments for silencing of which, preeminent among nations, it possessed a secret mastery.

And yet, when all has been allowed to O'Connor's moral bravado, his bellicose integrity, and to the sullen, fearful vengefulness of his society, an impression remains that he had knowingly courted disaster. In this period, his friend Sean O'Faolain, fellow writer, fellow Corkman, fellow ex-rebel, sent him a Corkman's hot-tempered but shrewd letter:

> To me, your irascibility is sheer nihilism. To me you are a magnificent anarchist . . . . I begin to believe, enfin, that you are just a bloody genius, and your notion that you are a man of action is a gigantic delusion, and you should be told to go away and write masterpieces—as, I have not the least doubt, you will do, and are doing.

It may be that he took the injunction to go away more literally than O'Faolain intended, and in more senses than the geographical; at the close of O'Connor's life, relations between these two boyhood friends, the two best Irish prose writers of their generation, were distant and strained. (Alert students of the niceties of Irish counties will have noticed O'Faolain's "enfin": Cork has always felt itself closer to Paris than to Dublin.)

In his autobiography, *Only Child* (1961), O'Connor has written movingly of those Republican soldiers who came out of the prison camps in 1923 to discover that the Ireland of their imagination had somehow shriveled beneath the unromantic sun of actuality. Some emigrated, some made their peace with the sunlight. O'Connor stayed at home, at least until the 1940s, but refused to make his peace. While Yeats was there, there was always a presence to assure him of the possibilities of magnanimity, heroism, and literary splendor.

A mother's boy, rejecting a father of brutal and hard-drinking flesh, he had sought fathers of the spirit—Corkery, AE, the ghost of Parnell, and at last he found Yeats. The Yeats of O'Connor's memoirs is a majestic giant—the old wizard had worked his magic on young Michael O'Donovan. But the hero-worshipping portrait does credit both to Yeats and to O'Connor—the portrait of a writer unwilling to accept from the world anything meaner or less splendid than his imagination of the world. O'Connor, in his quarrels with Ireland, adopted Yeats's lordly fighting stance, his pen a saber. His difficulty may well have been defined in a letter from the good-tempered but always shrewd O'Faolain.

> The people are our people, our fathers and mothers. They will take it from Yeats—from Parnell—but not from Mikey Donovan, nor even from Frank O'Connor, unless Frank is prepared to follow Yeats, and never, never, never go down to the gutter where familiarity breeds . . . familiarity.

O'Faolain knew his countrymen.

O'Connor was a bit of a genius—the only one I have ever known. And if you first met him years after reading and rereading the stories, the man was startling. The stories come to us through a complex narrative voice, the development of which Matthews traces with great sensitivity. It was a voice deliberately relaxed, sinuous in its responsiveness to the many voices of its society, rich in its colors and modulations. But the man lived in a blaze of intellectual and emotional fire—generous, fearless, sullen, candid, devious, fierce, gentle. A tangle of what would in others have seemed contradictions, but which came, in him, from some constant center of being.

Book reviewing has its own ironies; a mother's boy myself, my feelings toward this mother's boy were filial. Matthews has written a biography worthy of his subject. The biography that counts most of all, *The Collected Stories* of Frank O'Connor, was published two years ago.

**THOMAS FLANAGAN**

Thomas Flanagan's novel, *The Year of the French*, won the National Book Critic's Circle Award for fiction in 1979.

# MEMORIES OF A CATHOLIC BOYHOOD

## Seminary: A Search
## by Paul Hendrickson

(Summit Books, 320 pp., $14.95)

From Henry Adams to Holden Caulfield, Americans have learned about their changing values through literary examinations, autobiographical and factual or fictional, of a given era's educational hurdles, as experienced by one or another youthful figure. Inevitably, it seems, a youth has to struggle with his or her own personal desire to forsake the cultural and moral mandates of earlier generations; but in addition, often enough, the society itself, full of conflict, hence sending mixed messages, also causes anguished confusion to a certain young man or woman whose task it is to figure out how to live a life—where, under what circumstances, with whom. The Protestant and agnostic-liberal traditions have, by and large, dominated us ideologically—hence our continuing interest in, say, the ethical dilemmas confronting the young seaman in Melville's *Billy Budd*. Catholics have only recently been adding their share to this genre, as in J. F. Powers and Mary Gordon—and now, this fine



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book by Paul Hendrickson, a reporter for *The Washington Post*, who has gone back to his seminary days, and through a rendering of them, helped us understand what has happened to many of a particular generation of America's Catholic youth.

At fourteen Hendrickson left a middle-class, small-town Illinois home for the Holy Trinity Seminary, located in Russell County, Alabama—red clay soil, kudzu everywhere, and nearby, the Chattahoochee River working its way southward. "When I got there, in the late fifties," he tells us, "you could still see chain gangs in striped suits and leg irons working in the ditches by the road out front." Then there is this bit of Southern history: "The year before I came, the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on the seminary lawn in the middle of the night." Meanwhile, inside there was a whole new world to master: bells punctuating the Common Life; Major Silence and Minor Silence; the Master of Novices and his unremitting scrutiny; the Blessed Mother's altar and meals in the rectory; plaster saints galore staring into eternity, or smiling encouragement, or frowning disapproval; Vespers and Latin to study, but also, Latin the living language (still!) of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. "They called us *spes gregis*," Hendrickson recalls, and then, alas, feels it necessary (I suppose wisely) to translate, "hope of the flock." Other, more liturgical Latin expressions appear (*Tu autem Domine misereare nobis*, or *Introibo adaltare Dei*), reminders of what used to be heard in churches the world over, and also reminders that it is not only individual ex-seminarians but Church historians, and even a few ordinary laymen, who are scratching their heads and wondering how (and why) it all happened—and so quickly: an institution markedly transformed, and who knows if for the better.

THE HOLY TRINITY Seminary was founded in the 1920s by Father Thomas Judge, a Vincentian priest from South Boston who died of tuberculosis in 1933. He hungered for souls, and like others who have founded Catholic orders, combined interesting, apparently paradoxical qualities of mind and spirit—a mystical bent with a determined practicality, a humility and a capacity for self-criticism with an iron will, and a fierce ambitiousness. When Hendrickson arrived, in 1958, the Vatican had just sent its official Decree of Praise to the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, which then had "missions and parishes in fourteen states across the Southland." Take on those wayward Baptists, those lost, fiery Dixie evangelicals, those proper Presbyterians and moderate Methodists—bring the pagans back, one and all, to the Mother Church; and right under their noses educate and train disciples, prepare them for the wars that the Church Militant has always had to wage!

Yet, such messianic ardor would only for a while obtain the results Father Judge had hoped. He wanted to teach adolescent boys Latin and Greek, geometry and trigonometry, history and literature; but most of all, he wanted to turn them into priests. "Close to nine hundred boys" went through that good father's Southern seminary in the three decades of the '40s, '50s, and '60s, but just a handful are now priests. "In my own class," Hendrickson tells us, "twenty-one boys from eleven states, each boy thirteen or fourteen years old," began their training with him, and only one of them is now a priest.

NO BOOK is likely to explain exactly why each of those twenty left the Church's religious army. Like other social observers and religious authorities, the author dutifully mentions the ferment generated by Pope John XXIII and his reforms. But Hendrickson also shrewdly mentions the encyclical on birth control as a source of grievous disenchantment to millions of earnest Catholics who have, nevertheless, continued to use one or another contraceptive strategy, yet attend Church. And too, there was the general tumult of the 1960s—widespread youthful protest, a breakdown in social order, hence less respect for the authority of all institutions, that of the Church included. Still, one wonders why in the world such events had such an undermining effect on the number of vocations the Church could claim. Wars and revolutions and dramatic shifts of secular ideology or opinion have not been new to our century. Nor has the Church been unwilling in earlier centuries (or decades of this century) to modify its relationships to various "principalities and powers," be they political or social and cultural, as in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadrigessimo Anno*—and having done so, the result was, again and again, no loss of its traditional authority.


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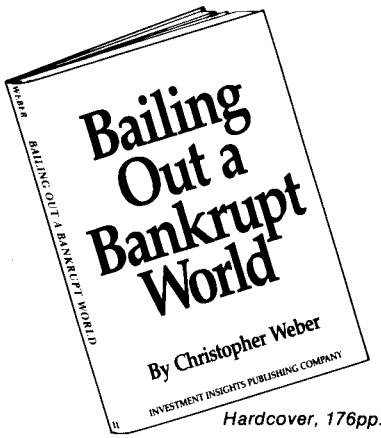


*Hardcover, 176pp.*

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A lifelong friend of mine, a conservative (politically and religiously) Jesuit, argues that the fatal step had to do with "demystification"—the abandonment of the Latin Mass, the unembarrassed entrance into this world of nuns and priests without their traditional garb, the folk masses and the Fridays that no longer had to be fish days, the sad accommodations to social science: pastoral counseling, and the introduction into Catholic schools of all sorts of "curricula" based on this or that theory of "human development." Hendrickson himself, like the rest of us, has obviously been served a stomachfull of such modern psychological knowledge, and has tried to use it in thinking about his personal struggle as a seminarian, and later, as a Catholic with religious doubts. But his primary interest is in conveying the complex texture of everyday human experience—and he does so exceedingly well: the sights and sounds of an episode of sorts in Mother Church's history.

Still, there is no doubt that his book offers its own kind of implied theory. He has painted a marvelous impressionistic canvas of midcentury American Catholicism, poised and confident in all its majesty and might—just before a certain precipitous fall. His powerful nostalgic evocation of elaborately clothed nuns whispering in the eager ears of parochial students, of rosaries recited endlessly, of holy communions offered and offered, of novenas made again and again, only prompts the reader to look around at today's Catholic population in America, and indeed, in the capitalist democracies of the West, and wonder whether our postindustrial world, with its frenzied consumerism and its exaltation of the self as the instrument of that overall consumption, is a place where the Christianity of St. Augustine and St. Francis and St. Teresa, or yes, Father Thomas Judge, has any chance whatsoever of substantial survival. That last Church father must have had his good reasons, even in the 1920s, to remove his future priests from a nearness to Boston and New York. But even the rural South would not offer the kind of sanctuary Father Judge sought, as Hendrickson shows in his novelistic (rather than didactic) manner of presentation:

> Three of four times a year we'd get a day in town. Town glimmered in our imagination for weeks. They'd cart us in on the seminary's old green buses, drop us off opposite Holy Family Catholic Church in Columbus, Georgia, and we'd then scatter like quail to the movies (the prefect would have posted the night before what was permissible to see), to sporting goods stores, to barbershops and shoeshine parlors, to the twenty-five cent photo booth in the back of Davison's Department Store (where we slung arms around one another and froze the moment in sepia), to Morrison's Cafeteria and the Goo-Goo Restaurant and the Black Angus (it was out on Victory Drive—you had to take a cab), but most especially to the Krystal, a

**POEM BEGUN IN THE HARO STRAIT WHEN I WAS 28 AND FINISHED WHEN I WAS 38**

Those I vainly wish to meet are like the whales.
I can hear their every breath loud as if near

Across the iris straits. First they exhale
With the bass rasp of a shovel digging a grave.

Then take in before the dorsal fin splits the sea
To cordwood above their head. It is a gasp.

They lift the cover. It has all been headfirst
For them. I love the way they buckle

Their dance-floor, destroy the limp waterlevel
Where, that year, we kept together

Because of the whales' schedule. Since
Those days when I was grateful, there is no one

I have not met, no one I haven't almost touched
While they parade as the whales do.

Those affectionate pods
Blend the space between nations. They believe

In riding buoyant and sunken, rowdy
And unreversed as they plough over

The dashed accident, swim toward the "Go away!"
I only spook at the buoy, the clear-voiced,

So clearly saying "Go away." Some expert
Makes clear voices for the buoys; but I've had

To torture out my cry, slap together my roar,
My entreaty, expurgate my whimper, my frog, a crack

In my testimony, had to sand my echo smooth
Until I thought it could be heard

With scientific charity. A dialect to say "Come here,
Come forward; you are in my family of languages."

Only to realize the buoy is not for the whale,
The buoy mines its throat for the boat.

It doesn't know one begging note a grampus has sung.
I should never have tried to love you with the mother tongue.

SANDRA MCPHERSON



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long and narrow oasis on Twelfth, where we hunched at the counter on red leatherette stools in a tarnished yellow gleam and gobbled fifteen cent hamburgers. Freedom was delirious. That night, riding home through the Alabama blackness, somebody would start singing about 'Brudder Gum' or 'I Got A Girl In Every Port', the tune humming, like the tires, against the asphalt and soft snoring.

*Seminary* invites comparison with James Agee's *Morning Watch*—both intent on characterizing the vicissitudes of youthful religious consciousness. Hendrickson is Agee's Richard, straining the eyes and bending the ears in order to figure out why and whither. But there is another aspect of *Seminary* that brings Agee to mind—the Agee, that is, of *Time* and *Fortune*: a strong, disciplined journalism has enabled this book's author to pursue his former fellow seminarians all over America, and learn of their present respective fates. The portraits of these men amount to—well, ourselves: social workers and psychologists and businessmen and teachers, men who shun war and men who fought like hell in war (including one who won the Medal of Honor in Vietnam). The description of the only survivor, so to speak (from the Church's viewpoint!) is powerful and affecting—Father Bertin Glennon, working among Appalachia's penniless yet proud mountain people, a lonely yet curiously happy curé in the tradition of Bernanos' unforgettable *Diary of a Country Priest*. And the cameo descriptions merit mention too: the Alabama blacks working in the kitchen, or on the seminary's farm; the two maiden ladies who prepare meals for the boys; and the various priests who attend them, inspire them, confound them, frighten the daylights out of them.

Grace, as Paul Hendrickson keeps observing, is the question that haunts the Church—God's mysterious will given so many expressions. He remembers with great and instructive care a kind of grace, one Catholic seminary and its peculiar, contemporary agonies. Grace, he knows, need not be success, as we of the secular world know it. Grace can be utter, painful failure—or apparent failure, as in the Crucifixion. Grace can be the continuing endurance of a black field hand, a white cooking lady—still there, living and working in Alabama, no matter the departure of all those seminarians. And yes, grace can be found in a book: a gifted writer's look backward at a given time and place, his look around at what we Americans seem to be about, his look inward at a soul's reasons, a soul's trials and turns, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

**ROBERT COLES**

# LOVE AND GUILT IN AFRICA

## An Ice-Cream War
## by William Boyd

(Morrow, 408 pp., $17.95)

I don't know when I have enjoyed a book more than this one, an involving historical novel set in East Africa during World War I. This is the territory sailed by "The African Queen" (I recognized the leeches), and one of the novel's pleasures is that it tells us more about the obscure war that kept interrupting the Bogie/Hepburn romance. It was a sideshow to the main event in Europe, this dessert or ice-cream war, pitting the largely black colonial armies of Great Britain and Germany against each other in the region that is now Tanzania. The war, however, is merely the context for the playing out of a human drama dealing with love and guilt, hate and vengeance.

The main line of the plot owes something to *The Four Feathers*, the Kordas's wonderful adventure film about debts of honor being settled by acts of valor in Africa. Just weeks before the guns of August go off, Gabriel Cobb, a young officer from a British military family, is married; he and his wife, Charis, are on their honeymoon in France when Austria declares war on Serbia, igniting the fuse of alliances leading to Germany and Britain. Gabriel is sent to India to pick up a regiment, thence to join the fighting already under way in German East Africa. In a gruesome scene, he is bayoneted in battle ("He wriggled desperately in an attempt to get out of the way, saw the second blade slice in just above the hip bone, glancing inward off his pelvis, feeling the rasp and judder of the point on the bone."), and taken prisoner. This happens in 1914; he spends the next four years as an orderly in a remote German military hospital. There he deliberately reinfects his wounds to escape the prison stockade and falls in love, reticently but implacably, with his robust German nurse, Liesl, who is also the wife of a high German staff officer. The reader can imagine the complications.

Meanwhile, back in England, Gabriel's younger brother, Felix, is thickening the plot. Bored at Oxford, unlucky with women, he enters into a love affair with his brother's wife. Their convincingly rendered physical passion blinds him to Charis's mounting guilt, which leads her to drown herself in the pond by which Felix first kissed her. Overcome with guilt himself, and cravenly fearful that Charis has revealed their secret affair in a letter to Gabriel, Felix wangles a commission and gets himself sent to Africa, hoping to find his brother and somehow make amends. Felix reaches Africa early in 1917, just in time to join in the chase of the German Schutztruppe. The British advance brings him closer and closer to Gabriel and to the novel's somber climax.

A side plot depicts the conflict between an American expatriate fighting with the British and Liesl's husband, the powerful Erich Von Bishop. The improbable American, Walter Smith, believes that his erstwhile neighbor, Von Bishop, seized the opportunity provided by the war to steal his valuable farm machinery, and he too is advancing with the British forces, hoping to even the score with Von Bishop. These then are the main characters. Mr. Boyd, an Englishman who has written about Africa before, deploys them over his large canvas with the skill of a veteran literary campaigner.

In the opening chapters the period detail is stippled in too heavily, as if the author felt he had to make certain points about the class structure and mores of the era. But once the main complications are in place, the characters take over, relegating the historical scenery to the background. Mr. Boyd's people possess no more life than the plot requires; they are not, in other



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words, large-scale depictions. Yet they are endowed with a subtle psychology. Boyd is particularly acute at showing how the era's high-minded moral code made self-deception inevitable, and he renders the ambivalence within love as well as the conflict between love and conscience with admirable dramatic firmness. He represents this tangled inwardness without imitating it in his prose, offering our American novelists a lesson in distanced creation.

The writing is nearly always equal to its occasions, never obtrusively brilliant or beautiful. For example, here is Walter Smith, reconnoitering his farm to see if it is still occupied by the Germans.

> Walter and Mr. Essanje looked in the direction he indicated. Walter saw the rocks, warm in the morning sun.
>
> Then suddenly they seemed to explode in puffs of thick black smoke. A second later came the loud report of rifles. The thorn bushes around them seemed to be plucked and shaken by invisible hands.

Here is one of Gabriel's fellow officers immediately after being hit in the face by a bullet. The description is horrific without being forced:

> One or several bullets had removed Gleeson's lower jawbone in its entirety, but somehow his tongue had been untouched. It now lolled, uncontained, at his throat like a thick fleshy cravat. . . .

And finally, this inspired bit of bizarrerie:

> Cave, as he was known for convenience sake, was a large fresh-faced man who, with limited resources, did his utmost to preserve the atmosphere of mindless ragging and frivolous high jinks that had thrived in Oxford's pre-war days. His missing hand had been replaced by a crude wooden one, and his favorite trick was to set fire to it in restaurants.

Mr. Boyd, a lecturer in English at Oxford, puts his learning to use in this novel, providing an extra dimension of delight. For example, the battle in which Gabriel is wounded is seen through his panic-stricken eyes; and as he stumbles randomly across the battlefield, we glimpse the outline of his great model, Nicholas Rostov, staggering through the cordite mists of Austerlitz. The dead Charis, strapped to a marble bust at the bottom of the pond, may also be familiar:

> A length of twine was tied round her neck, its ends in turn wrapped and secured with many knots about the marble head. Through the drifting clouds of mud and sediment he saw that her eyes and mouth were open, her face relaxed and expressionless. Her hair had loosened itself and streamed weedily about her features, stirred by the currents of water caused by his beating, flailing hands.

The echo is to the similar image of the drowned lovers, also at the bottom of a pond, in *Women In Love*. Finally, when at the end of the novel Felix spares Liesl some cruel news about her husband, we are reminded of Marlowe's reticence before Kurtz's widow in *Heart of Darkness*.

*An Ice-Cream War* is a historical novel in the essential sense that it depicts characters whose morality and emotions belong fully to their time. It was a time when even war had its etiquette, as several ironic scenes remind us, and when men could regard atrocities as breaches of personal honor, that demanded redress. The slaughter in Europe was of course blasting the personal element out of war, and so one is oddly moved watching these characters act as if feeling matters while the vast impersonal conflagration leaps and roars offstage.

**JACK BEATTY**


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CORRESPONDENCE, *from page 2*

human dignity only by a weaker imitation of the method of their oppressors. Just as surely, it would be foolish of me to be too glib about the agonizing battles that will be fought in black hearts as they set out to claim that recognition. But if the homage that we are paying to Mohandas K. Gandhi is anything deeper than the current fashion, might not South Africa be the place for the greatest campaign of nonviolent resistance the world has ever seen?

HAROLD RIEDL
*Baltimore, Maryland*

## IRREGULAR REGULATIONS

*To the editors:*

Mark Green erroneously believes ("The Gang That Can't Deregulate," TNR, March 21) that since Americans do not want dioxin in their backyards, they must be in favor of air bags. Green starts with polls indicating support for the environmental government and imputes the results to other governmental intervention. I would like to see the results of a separate poll on the popularity of seat-belt buzzers. Green epitomizes the problem of overregulation by attempting to expand the S.E.C., which was chartered to ensure a fair securities market, to the position of moral guardian of corporate America.

Ronald Reagan erroneously believes that since the American people are tired of inefficient big government, their disenchantment will cause them to accept solvents in their drinking water.

Our next President should be a strong environmentalist, and yet someone who will not appoint Joan Claybrook or Ralph Nader to anything.

DAVID R. WINTERS
*Lansdowne, Pennsylvania*



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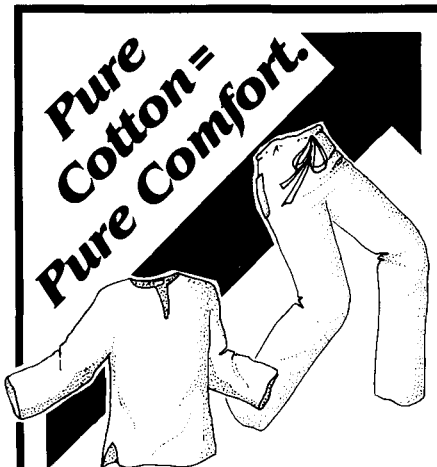


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# EAST GERMAN DIARIST

## *Tides and Tidings*

**EAST GERMANY** is a country of Germans, but it is not a German state. Something like 200,000 Soviet troops are stationed in this country of 16 million people. The tourist sees almost no sign of them in the cities or on the highways. East German students tell me that Red Army soldiers are usually kept strictly to their bases; they mingle with the populace only at the risk of official reprisal. The locals rarely see them. On the other hand, Soviet technicians and advisers abound, and they seem to have few illusions about their popularity in their home away from home. Twice during my stay I asked for directions from men who turned out to be Russian. Hearing themselves addressed in German by a large, unfamiliar, and rapidly advancing youth, both instinctively cringed, turned their backs, and prepared to flee. It was only after I explained in simple words that I was a foreign tourist in need of help that they regained their composure sufficiently to snub me.

**I WAS IN EAST GERMANY** at Christmas time: the season is marked by a cautious festivity. In the butcher shops, whipped cream adorns smiling pigs' heads, spelling out a greeting that translates roughly as "Happy Holidays." Many private homes display a gay electric window ornament that appears to be a compromise between the Star of Bethlehem and Sputnik. Christmas trees are on sale in the big cities. Even *Eulenspiegel*, the official journal of humor, is not above cracking a few good ones about Father Christmas and stocking presents. Although the East German government is militantly atheist, it tolerates—and in small ways, even promotes—the Yuletide celebration. The secret: keep Christ out of Christmas. This has not proved to be all that difficult. What we now call Christmas was originally a pagan holiday in Germany. Before "Father Christmas" cleaned up his act, he was a Teutonic forest god (and not a very nice fellow, if the truth be known). The early Christmas tree was decorated not with painted baubles, but with the innards of vanquished enemies. The German word for Christmas, *Weihnacht*, "consecrated night," makes no direct mention of Jesus. Christmas in East Germany is a tentative celebration of national identity, a gingerly hearkening back to an earlier Aryan time.

**MARKET RESEARCH** is not the strongest facet of the East German economy. "Dominator" beer is sold in Weimar; "69" toothpaste comes in the family-size tube; and even the most expensive record players only play mono. Yet despite such insensitivities to consumer preferences, East German households appear to enjoy at least a modest level of material comforts. Food stores are well stocked: although the range of produce is limited (few fresh vegetables, almost no fresh fruit), those goods available are cheap and of high quality. (East Germany's food situation stands in striking contrast to most other Warsaw Pact states: bakeries in Moscow are now handing out booklets describing appetizing meals that can be made from stale bread.) Fashions for both old and young may run toward the inadvertently punk, but most young men and many younger mothers wear the coveted blue jeans. Waiters and sales personnel, unlike those in the U.S.S.R. and much of Eastern Europe, do not dart away when a customer asks for service. And though I had heard and read about shortages in the *Ostblok*, the only stores I saw where lines were longer than in midtown Manhattan were the flower shops. These seemed consistently overwhelmed by customers; in one case a line ran out to the corner and around it. Living standards in the East and West can only be compared imperfectly. But from what I could see, I would guess that the East German family's purchasing power is about half as great as that of its West German counterpart.

**HELD UP AGAINST** West Germany, East Germany's experiment in prosperity looks pretty shabby—all the more so when you remember that it was the richer portion of the Reich before 1939. But measured against a capitalist democracy like Britain, East Germany's material progress since 1950 is impressive. Fiddled official statistics notwithstanding, there is little doubt that East Germany has grown with considerably greater speed over the last generation than has the U.K. By many measures East Germany's output per person may now exceed Britain's. If East Germany has problems, they are not founded in poverty and inefficiency. People do not risk their lives in hot air balloons simply to double their incomes.

**WHY DO SLAVS** living under Communism lose themselves in alcohol when Germans do not? Why does a Communist Germany make its trains run on time and fill its stores with high quality (if eccentric) consumer goods when its fraternal allies cannot seem to do so? Perhaps the answer has something to do with what it means to be German. Idealists and philanthropists in our country currently resist the notion that there is such a thing as a national character. Well-meaning though this may be, they are closing their eyes in the face of the obvious. For all the great variety that people may embody, there is a German national essence. To consider oneself German is to be pulled by powerful tides. Even if one talks to East Germans about pleasantries, the subject of the reunification of the Germanys invariably, almost obsessively, comes up. In the Federal Republic of Germany, opinion polls indicate that only 8 percent of the public believes the Germanys will be reunited before the end of the century; in East Germany there are no polls, but the fraction can hardly be much higher. Yet private conversations here are full of talk about a reunion of the German *Volk*. What such talk implies is that East Germans are prepared to wait out their present government. They seem prepared to outwait it, moreover, not as individuals, *but as a people*. The implications of this attitude are profound, for it cannot but affect the Soviet Union's assessment of the feasibility of détente, and in a larger sense, of prospects for long-term peace in Europe.

**NICK EBERSTADT**

Nick Eberstadt is a visiting fellow at the Center for Population Studies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is writing a book with Tom Ricks on Soviet-American politics.



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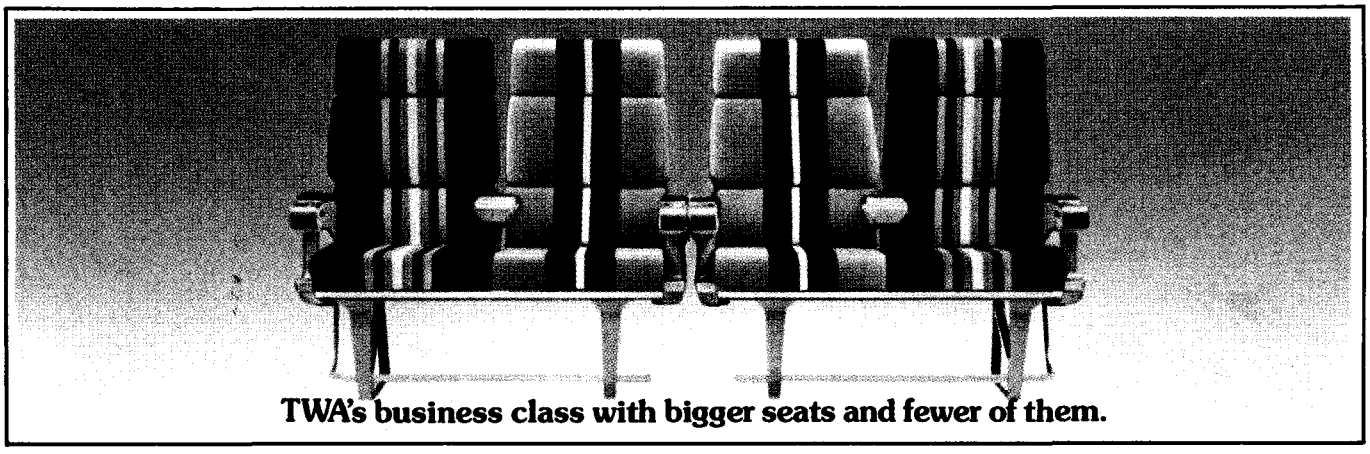

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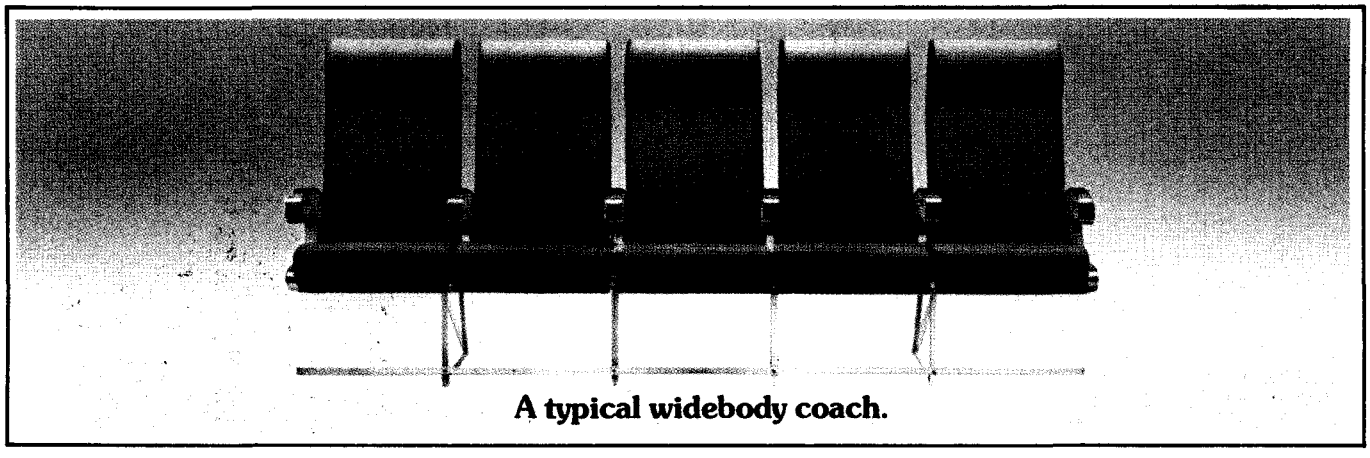

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